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Warriors Super Edition: Snowwhisper's Descent

Snowwhispers Descent

IxyXVIII

Prologue

It was a moonlit night, and the moonlight shone heavy on the island below. The lake was glistening like stars and a stream of cats walked over it to the island.

“Lionstar…” a voice politely greeted the golden ancient tabby.

“Hello Pikestar….” Lionstar dipped his head to the white and black striped Tom.

“Interesting night for a Gathering… it's been a leaf-bare or two since we were able to cross the water without using the tree-bridge,” Pikestar stared across the water, his green gaze focused on the sheet of ice.

Below cats mingled in the moonlight, they greeted each other cordially. It wasn't a friendly night, it was cold and leaf-bare was making even the usually plump Riverclan cats look skinny.

“Where is Windclan?” A grumpy and raspy voice spoke beside him.

Lionstar turned his head to the prickly she-cat, “Needlestar…. You know this leaf-bare is harsh. Give them a little more time…”

“Anymore time and every cat here will freeze their paws off…” commented the black and white leader, Violetstar.

Lionstar sighed, “I suppose you are right…”

Below him and enormous fluffy cat called, “Lionstar! I smell Windclan!”

Below them, wiry haired and very skinny cats streamed into the clearing, they took their places, flowing like water into the crowd. A very skinny black tom, struggled up next to the other leaders.

Needlestar snapped, “what took you so long? We nearly froze to death waiting for you Scorchstar!”

Scorchstar looked embarrassed, “I apologize… one of the apprentices wanted to try their luck on thin ice. We were able to pull them out but they got their paws wet for sure!”

Lionstar purred with laughter, “I suppose it was punishment enough,” he paused and called out, “All cats! Let us commence the gathering!”

His voice however was so cracked with age he could barely get the words out. He could hear his long gone mate, Cinderheart, purring playfully in his ears, ‘what? Can't even get your voice out anymore old lion?!’

As he went to call again for attention, Needlestar snapped, “LET THE GATHERING COMMENCE BEFORE OUR PAWS FREEZE OFF!”

Lionstar looked at her begrudgingly, and the cat below gave a sympathetic glance. Needlestar reported, “our clan is doing well! It is a harsh leaf-bare but life still goes on! Two kits were born to Cherrywhisker! Nightkit and Sagekit! Shadowclan remains as strong as ever!”

Violetstar took her place, “Nothing to report in Skyclan, the prey is running well. We have had no other fox problems as of late.”

Scorchstar stepped forward, he was the youngest leader out of all of them. He looked embarrassed, “we have two new apprentices, Rabbitpaw and Grasspaw!”

Lionstar looked down at the two young cats. He let out a small purr as he saw one shivering. It must have been Rabbitpaw, since his ears were rather large. Grasspaw stood next to him, obviously

trying to keep him warm, despite her shorter fur.

Scorchstar purred, “other than that we Windclan cats are as adverse to water as ever.”

“Leave the water to Riverclan….” Pikestar stepped forward and looked around, “Riverclan is doing well despite the frozen waters. We still have plenty of prey, we have one new warrior, Marshfire!”

The huge tom dipped his head as cats cheered his name.

“We have two new apprentices! Blazepaw and Greenpaw!” Pikestar looked down at the small cats.

Lionstar saw a small cat with beautiful green eyes. Next to her was a cat that blazed like fire even in the shallow moonlight.

Lionstar stepped forward, he opened his mouth to speak only to be interrupted.

“LIONSTAR!” A cat yowled urgently and made him jump.

“B...bluesong… what is the meaning of th-” but before he finished his sentence his gaze fell on a cat trailing behind Bluesong.

It was the elder, Ivypool, something limp hung from her jaws. The cats parted like water as Ivypool made her way forward. The weak looking white fur in her jaws carried the scent of blood.

“Is that a kit?!” Scorchstar leapt down and the leaders surrounded the cats.

“Make room!” A voice snapped, “let me see the kit!”

The leaders backed up as a small group of cats took their place. It was the healers, the medicine cats.

“She isn't hurt… but she is weak…” a small Tom commented.

“She will need warmth and food or she will not survive the night…” murmured a Tom with brown spots.

“Who will take the kit then?” Needlestar looked around at her fellow leaders.

“I cannot …..” Scorchstar shook his head, “we have no queens at the moment.

Violetstar looked as if she was about to say something when all of the cats in the clearing we're startled. A flash of light sliced through the sky followed by a resounding boom. Cats in the clearing scattered but their leaders managed to round them up.

The medicine cats were all bristling, finally the older medicine cat in Thunderclan, Alderheart, spoke up, “it is a sign! Thunderclan will take the kit!”

Lionstar looked surprised, “we do have some nursing queens and I cannot fight the will of Starclan….” He looked at the small scrap of white fur.

Bluesong eagerly stepped forward, “Sweetflower will gladly take her. She loves kits!”

None of the other leaders protested as the kit was swiftly taken away by Bluesong. The elder, Ivypool, spoke up, “there is something you need to see….”

Lionstar nodded, he sent his deputy, Chestnutfur home and the other leaders sent their respective deputies with their clans home.

Ivypool limped along, her gaze was shadowed with unreadable emotion as she made her way through ferns. Needlestar didn't hesitate to follow and shoved her way through the undergrowth. Scorchstar and Lionstar watched as Pikestar and Violetstar followed. Scorchstar seemed to hesitate, he looked fairly nervous. Lionstar gave him a sympathetic glance. He dipped his head, “you first young one…”

Scorchstar gave him a glance, shook his head, then headed into the undergrowth. Lionstar followed, he halted as he almost collided with Scorchstars hindquarters. Scorchstar was staring, ears flat back and amber eyes wide. Lionstar shouldered past him. He could

hardly breathe as he witnessed the gruesome sight.

Two kits… or what he assumed, use to be kits, were laying, bloody and in parts across the clearing. The jaws of some Savage creature had obviously found their way to the kits. Lionstar looked at Ivypool who was heading over to a rather snowy clump. She flicked her tail and rasped, “I found the kit in here, the snow must have hidden her scent and her white pelt probably kept he safe here. I imagine she was too weak to cry out…”

Needlestar looked unscathed as she replied, “it was probably a fox… must have been able to cross the waters when they froze over.”

Violetstar cringed, “but no mother would ever leave her kits here in the middle of winter.”

Needlestar snorted, “not all cats are the caring mother's we make them out to be…”

Scorchstar spoke up, the black tom sounded proud, “couldn't Riverclan have been the only one to cross the water?”

Pikestar glared at him suddenly, his striped pelt bristling, “the only apprentices we have had in moons have been Blazepaw and Greenpaw… no Riverclan queen would abandon her kits! Besides the ice on the lake was solid enough for any cat to cross safely… or predator.”

The other leaders grimaced, Lionstar waived his tail for attention, “Fan out… let's search for any sign of the mother. Scorchstar… you and Pikestar bury the kits.”

Scorchstar nodded swiftly and Pikestar gave him a defiant glance, before he begrudgingly went to help Scorchstar.

Ivypool limped forward and sniffed at the bodies. She opened her jaws wife to taste the scents around them, “no clan smells this way…”

Lionstar looked at her and suddenly got close to her. He spoke in a low voice, “Ivypool…. Go to Sweetflower… when I get back I will

make an announcement to the clan, but this kit will be raised strictly Thunderclan. She must not remember such tragedies… she must know nothing of her past… is this clear?”

Ivypool nodded, “so you're ordering me for Sweetflower to lie to her kit?”

Lionstar glared then sighed, “it's the only way we can keep her from being so different from the others …. Her pelt already stands out so much, for her to have the best life possible, she must not know of her terrible past.”

Ivypool nodded and disappeared into the treeline.

Lionstar looked up into the sky, “Starclan…. What do you have planned for us now?”

He sighed and disappeared into the underbrush to begin the long search for the missing mother…. And the predator in the dark.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Warm fur was pushed against Snowkit. She hadn't opened her eyes yet but she felt it, a warm light filtering through the holes in wherever she was. She opened her brilliant blue eyes and stared up at the lump of brown splotchy fur. It was breathing slowly, and Snowkit asked, “Mother?”

The cat opened her eyes. An warm amber gaze was staring back, “you're awake! It's so good to see you up Snowkit!”

Snowkit stared up at her, “you're Sweetflower? You're so pretty!”

Sweetflower purred, “thank you Snowkit… you are pretty as well…”

Their conversation was interrupted, a small cat came tumbling in, “Sweetflower! Bloodpaw is making fun of me again!”

Snowkit stared at the tiny gray kit. She was so fluffy compared to Snowkit's short all white pelt. She suddenly got up and tumbled out of her mother's best over to the other kit, “who is making fun of you?”

The other kit looked surprised and her amber eyes gleamed with excitement, “Snowkit! You're awake! I'm your sister, Cloudkit.”

Cloudkit weaved her way around Snowkit. Her fluffy tail trailed over Snowkit's pink nose, making her sneeze. Snowkit tilted her head, “you're my sister? Who is Bloodpaw? Why is he making fun of you? You seem really nice.”

Cloudpaw sighed, “he doesn't think I can be a warrior. It's because I'm sick a lot, but I think I'll be the strongest warrior in Thunderclan!” She bounced around and paused, “you're going to be a Thunderclan warrior with me. Thunderclan is the greatest clan in

the forest.”

Snowkit watched the small kit bounce around. She looked past her at the light pouring through the nursery entrance.

Another cat, larger than Sweetflower, spoke up, “maybe you should show her around outside Cloudkit, she would probably like being shown across the camp.”

Cloudkit nodded, “you're right Sunflower!” She purred, completely forgetting about being made fun of, “come on Snowkit! Let me show you around camp. I'll introduce you to Rainkit, she's your other sister.”

Sunflower swished her tail. The pale yellow tabby added, “perhaps you could introduce her to Pinekit and Oakkit while you're at it.”

Cloudkit flattened her ears, “maybe Pinekit…. But Oakkit is practicing with Bloodpaw in the clearing…”

She shook her head, “anyway, let's go, Rainkit is probably hanging around Chestnutfur.”

Cloudkit led her sister out. Snowkit noted how fluffy her sisters tail was. Was she that fluffy? As she stared down to look at her all what pelt, she ended up stumbling and falling. Cloudkit let out a loud mrrow of laughter. Snowkit looked upset, “Hey, don't make fun of me.”

A shadow suddenly blotted out the sun. Snowkit stared up and saw the biggest cat that she had seen so far. The amount of fur there must have been the size of the whole nursery. A voice replied, a deep and female voice, “It is all in good fun, Snowkit.”

Snowkit leapt up, her fur bushing out to make herself about twice her tiny size. Next to the huge cat was a small cat, just a little bigger than Cloudkit. She was about as fluffy as the smaller kit, but her pelt was different. Snowkit noted that her pelt was a soft white with splashes of grey, her eyes were amber just like Cloudkit.

The bigger cat, the huge cat, purred suddenly, “no need to be frightened sweet kit. I'm the Thunderclan deputy, Chestnutfur. It is

a pleasure to finally see you up and about. I'm sorry it had to be when the weather was so cold."

Snowkit had not really noticed the cold until Chestnutfur mentioned it, "Deputy?"

The kit next to the large cat answered, "the rank before leader, it is a high rank in the clan."

Chestnutfur nodded, "well said Rainkit, now I must go speak with Lionstar. Why don't you spend some time with your siblings?"

Chestnutfur dipped her head and appeared to go up onto a ledge and into a small hole in the side of it. Snowkit looked around, they were surrounded by walls of stone. She noticed the breeze was shaking some trees at the top of the stone walls. She glanced around the clearing, several cats were milling about structures that Snowkit didn't recognize. She noticed a small cat came out of a crack in the stone wall, who was he?

Rainkit spoke up, "why don't I show you around?"

"Hey! Rainkit don't take all the-" Cloudkit's voice ended suddenly with a cough.

Rainkit stared at her sister, "Cloudkit, you have already strained yourself getting into a fight with Oakkit and arguing with Bloodpaw. You need to rest."

Cloudkit opened her mouth to argue but it ended in a flurry of coughs. She just nodded suddenly and turned away from them. Her tail trailed on the ground and her ears were down as her body was wracked with coughs. As she vanished into the nursery, another brown cat followed, looking concerned and with something in his jaws.

Snowkit looked at Rainkit, "what's wrong with Cloudkit?"

Rainkit looked at her, "I'm not really sure…" she murmured, "she has always been this way. She will be fine now come with me."

Snowkit watched at Rainkit headed towards a large structure.

She dipped her head as a white cat with gray paws came walking out, “this is the warriors den. This is where the warriors sleep. Over there is the apprentices den… soon we will all be sleeping in there. Next to that is the elders den, I'll bring you there next. Fernsong loves kits and telling stories to them, Lilyheart is pretty nice too, although I would avoid Ivypool, she is a bit grumpy.”

Rainkit began trotting across the clearing, her fluffy tail was high in the air. Snowkit followed, her gaze glancing around. She halted, tilting her head briefly, before running up to her sister.

"What's wrong?" Rainkit stopped and meowed.

Snowkit shook her head, "nothing… just saw something a little weird over there. I didn't recognize that cat?"

Rainkit furrowed her brow, "what? What cat?"

Rainkit ran across the clearing, the opposite of the way the elders den was. She began sniffing along the ground. Snowkit looked up, confusion lighting her gaze. Above her was a stubby bush, sticking out of a craggy rock, but other than that, the mysterious gray cat was gone.

Rainkit let out a purr, "it's just a bush! No scary mysterious cat over here!"

Snowkit protested, "no! I'm telling you I saw a cat!"

The wind suddenly picked up above the hollow. It was enough to drive a cold wind, whistling down. Snowkit pressed against Rainkit and shivered. A large, fluffy form, came bounding over.

"Come on, let's get you over to the nursery! It's getting cold and looks like it's going to rain. Don't want sick kits on our hands!" Chestnutfur swept the kits up with her tail.

They were about to protest but the warmth of the nursery called them. Rainkit walked in, confidently, looking confused for a moment. Snowkit stumbled in, feeling tired to the bone.

Sweetflower purred suddenly, "come and get some rest little

kits…. Cloudkit has to spend the day in the medicine den, but she will be fine there!"

Rainkit settled against her mother's soft fur. Snowkit piled on next to her. Their mother began to softly lap them with her tongue. Rainkit swiftly fell asleep. Snowkit felt her eyes grow heavy. She began to think about the mysterious gray cat she had seen in the clearing. It was a bit odd, because they….

Could they have been a Starclan cat? But if that were the case, why appear to her? She didn't want to be a medicine cat, and she knew they had strong connections to Starclan. More than anything she wanted to be a warrior.

Feeling that, she decided she would go to sleep, keeping her secret to herself. She would be a warrior…. Even if it meant hiding some little details that no one else needed to hear.

Chapter 2

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Highledge for a clan meeting!" Lionstars voice rang out over the idle clearing.

Beneath him, three young cats sat next to a gorgeous tortoiseshell. She appeared to be fussing and licking them over. Their pelts gleamed in the early sunshine.

"Hey! Stop! If you lick me anymore, my pelt is going to come off!" Snowkit complained.

"Your pelt is fine, and you should respect your mother. You only become an apprentice once you know!" Sweetflower fretted.

A rather raggedy looking Tom with deep orange eyes, so deep they looked red, passed by. He stopped to make a jibe at one of the kits, "are you certain SHE is ready to become an apprentice?"

He nodded at Cloudkit. The small white and gray kit, gave him a look of defiance. Sweetflower bristled and let out a growl, "Bloodbath… maybe you should go take a seat before you say something you really regret."

"I suggest you do that as well," Chestnutfur came up behind Bloodbath, her gaze a bit dangerous.

Bloodpath grumbled and went to sit by a small brown queen. Another smaller apprentice leaned up to whisper something in his ear. Bloodpath let out a snort, and curled his tail around his white paws.

"Today is a very special day. Sweetflowers kits have reached six moons! And they will now start their journey to become blossoming young warriors!"

Snowkit lashed her tail, she looked really eager. Next to her,

Cloudkit appeared to be shaking in excitement. Rainkit was as calm as usual, just staring up at their leader with a cool green expression. Snowkit noted how professional her sister always looked, especially compared to her.

"I, as leader of Thunderclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to acknowledge these cats are ready to train as warriors. They will lay their life on the line for the good of the clan and be rewarded greatly. Rainkit, step forward please." Lionstar

motioned with his tail.

Rainkit trotted forward. Her tail was held up and her head high. She ran to the bottom of the Highledge. Snowkit could tell she was trying not to burst at the seams with excitement. She was doing her best to maintain her cool behavior.

"Chestnutfur, it is about time you had another apprentice. I trust you can pass on your sense of loyalty and light heartedness even in the most dark of nights. Rainkit, from this moment on you shall be known as Rainpaw!"

Rainpaw walked forward and touched noses with her mentor. Snowkits eyes grew wide. Her sister was apprenticed to the clan deputy? She couldn't imagine how hard her training was going to be.

"Snowkit, please step forward."

Snowkit jerked out of her thoughts. She scrabbled forward eagerly. She heard a couple snorts of amusement from other cats in the crowd.

"Snowkit, from this moment on, your name shall be Snowpaw. Your mentor will be Cedarpelt. Cedarpelt, I trust you can pass on your discipline and patience to Snowpaw."

Snowpaw walked forward. She touched noses with Cedarpelt. His yellow eyes were gleaming with hardness. Snowpaw found apprehension growing inside of her. Did Cedarpelt even want to be her mentor?!

"And now, we have one m-"

"Wait, with all due respect, Lionstar, are you sure you should be making Cloudkit into a warrior?" Redsong, a small she-cat, lashed her tail.

"Do NOT interrupt the clan leader, Redsong!" Chestnutfur narrowed her eyes, "if you do, there better be a really good reason for it."

Redsong shook her head, "Cloudkit has always been a sick cat. If we take her into the forest, chances are she won't make it back home. She has been to the medicine den more times than any of us combined. Maybe she would be best suited for nursery life? Or helping the medicine cats?"

Sweetflower rounded on Redsong, "my daughter will be whatever she wishes. Shame on you for stepping on a young cats dream. It isn't your decision to make, if anything it is HERS and LIONSTARS!"

"ENOUGH!" The clearing fell silent as Lionstars voice rang out around the hollow.

He turned his gaze on Cloudkit, "Cloudkit. What do you think? Do you wish to be a warrior or take another path?"

Cloudkit paused, she appeared to be thinking for a moment. She walked forward, letting out a small cough as she did. Her yellow gaze locked with Lionstars for a moment, before she turned to address the clearing.

"I may have been to the medicine den a lot more than you all have. But… I believe that I should get at least a chance to prove I can be the type of warrior Thunderclan wants me to. Yes… there are other ways to help out, but I want to take on the warrior path like my mother and father did." Cloudkit spoke with confidence.

"Good. Then from this moment on you shall be known as Cloudpaw. Your mentor shall be Bloodpath-" Lionstar was once again interrupted.

"WHAT?! He was just made a warrior!" Cedarpelt exclaimed, "and

you're giving him an apprentice, and a weak one at that, already?!"

Bloodpath lashed his tail, "She'll die before we make it to the top of the hollow. I would be SURPRISED if she made it anywhere near to being a warrior. Have you got bees in your brain Lionstar?!"

Lionstar stared at him steadily, "so you're saying this is too much of a challenge for you then, Bloodpath?"

Bloodpath opened his mouth for a moment before shutting it again. Snowpaw could tell her sister was looking uncomfortable despite her steady gaze.

"Very well… Bloodpath is your mentor. We will look forward to the day you can join us as a full warrior of Thunderclan!" Lionstar meowed.

Cloudpaw dashed over and touched noses with Bloodpath. He snorted and looked away, clearly not happy by this decision. Snowpaw bounded over, "wow! That was something wasn't it?!"

Cloudpaw curled her tail over her paws, "I'm going to be a warrior. I'm going to work my hardest to do it…. Even if no one else believes in me, I believe in my self."

Snowpaw licked her ear fondly, "I believe in you."

"As do I!" Rainpaw came bounding over.

"Cloudpaw!" Bloodpath snapped, "we're going to see the borders, are you going to sit around like a lazy lump or actually come with me?"

Cloudpaw looked apologetic and dashed after her mentor. Cedarpelt came up behind her, "we are going to look at the borders with them, Snowpaw, I suggest you follow me."

Snowpaw leapt up eagerly. Rainpaw looked over at her mentor who was talking with Lionstar diligently. Chestnutfur looked up and motioned her head for Rainpaw to come over.

"Gotta go!" Rainpaw ran over to her mentor.

Snowpaw purred and followed up behind Cedarpelt.

"Alright… now that we are in the woods… I have a few questions for you two. What are the five clans we currently have around the lake?" Cedarpelt asked.

Cloudpaw was wheezing but holding in her urge to cough. Snowpaw thought for a moment, "that would be...Riverclan, Skyclan, Thunderclan, Shadow clan….."

Cloudpaw burst in, "and Windclan!"

Cedarpelt nodded in approval, "yes…. We share a border with three clans. Unfortunately that makes us a little vulnerable in those terms. Come with me and I'll see if you can identify their scent."

The patrol headed North on Thunderclan territory. Snowpaw was drinking in the scents of the lush greenery and the prey rich forest. It was a far cry from the Leaf-bare she had grown up in. The best part… was that it wasn't cold enough to freeze a cat's tail off. Snowpaw opened her mouth again to breath in the rich scents of Thunderclan territory but halted mid scent.

A musty smell was drifting towards her. It smelled similar to Thunderclan, but something was a little off. She inhaled again.

"Now…. Here are the markers with one of our rivals. Which Clan do you think it is?" Cedarpelt swept his tail over the earth as if showing them the territory beyond.

Cloudpaw wheezed but piped up, "I'm going to guess, is it Skyclan?"

Cedarpelt let out a hardy purr, "very good. Yes, this is our border with Skyclan. They are most known for jumping high into the air to get their prey."

"That makes sense…. Their trees are a bit sparser than ours…" Cloudpaw added.

Snowpaw nodded in agreement and the patrol moved on.

Bloodpath hadn't breathed a single word of praise in his sister's direction. He just trampled through the forest like a bitter badger.

Cedarpelt sighed, "I guess we are lucky we aren't on a hunting patrol with all that noise going on."

Uncertainty sat like a cold stone in Snowpaws belly as the patrol walked through the forest. If Bloodpath could never get along with Cloudpaw, how could she ever be a warrior?

Chapter 3

Chapter 3:

Rainpaw was waiting in the clearing. The warmth of Sunhigh bathed her pelt. She shut her eyes, relishing it all she could. The sound of heavy pawsteps alerted her and her eyes fluttered open.

Sunlight, a tom, was padding towards her. He had a gleam of humor in his green eyes. His fluffy tail was thrown over his back. Rainpaw couldn't help but compare him to a chick. His fur was as soft as the downy feathers on a newly hatched bird. He was…. Clumsy. Yet he was a respectable warrior.

"Enjoying the sun Rainpaw?" Sunlight asked a bit cheerily.

Rainpaw dipped her head, "yes, while I can. Is Chestnutfur coming?"

"Right behind you!" The light of the sun seemed to vanish as her mentors large form waltzed up behind her, "you still need to learn to be more aware of your surroundings young Rainpaw! I could have pounced on you!"

Sunlight purred, "to be fair we were having a conversation!"

"A warrior needs to be alert at all times, conversation or not!" Rainpaw stammered suddenly, "anyway…. I'm ready for border patrol!"

Chestnutfur licked her fluffy brown pelt, "I'm glad someone is. Redsong was as grumpy as a nest full of badgers this morning…."

"Are you surprised?" The voice of Rainpaws father, Bluesong, hung in the air.

Rainpaw purred at the sight of her father. She wondered how such a petite tom made for such a strong warrior.

"Then again, Redsong and I trained together, so I suppose I know her better than any cat." Bluesong purred.

Chestnutfur shook out her pelt, "anyway! It's about time we went out for a border patrol. The other clans will be halfway across our territory if we don't stop chattering like sparrows!"

She jerked her head, "come along Rainpaw! I expect you are quite excited for your first border patrol."

Chestnutfur headed the patrol. Rainpaw followed behind the fluffy

haunches of her mentor. Sunshine, Bluesong, and another warrior, Sparrow-eye, followed behind them. The patrol was a decent size, but not a large one. Rainpaw figured with how peaceful everything seemed to be, they didn't need such a large patrol.

The air was light and a small breeze made everything fresh. Rainpaw relished the rich scents of the forest. Her ears picked up traces of bird song, echoing through the trees.

Suddenly, Chestnutfur sped up. The large she-cat had started to move a little faster and then was suddenly at a sprint. Rainpaws eyes widened, she started to run as well. She had no idea why her mentor had sped up all of the sudden. The rest of the patrol was keeping pace with her, and Rainpaw found herself falling behind.

Ahead of her, she saw the back of Sunshine sail over a log. Rainpaw judged the distance as she ran and took a leap. She crashed down on the log hard, driving the wind out of her. Rainpaw tumbled to the other side and floundered around in the leaves for a moment, before teeth met her scruff.

Rainpaw gasped as she was hauled to her feet. Sunlight was standing in front of her, his green eyes alight with humor. He swished his tail, "don't worry. I won't tell anyone. And your legs will grow longer. We have all been there! Come on, just a bit further!"

Rainpaw was too embarrassed to make a retort. She just dashed after him and found Chestnutfur sitting next to Sparrow-eye and Bluesong. She swished her huge tail, "it's about time you showed up! Goodness…. Why does it look as though you got into a fight with a plant?"

Rainpaw looked away, too embarrassed to answer. Chestnutfur purred, "anyway. Rainpaw, can you tell me where the border is and what Clan it belongs to? Besides us obviously!"

Rainpaw nodded. She stepped forward and took a deep and long breath with her jaws open. Her ears strained to give her any hint as to where they were. It wasn't long until a musty scent hit the back of her throat. Her face screwed up in disgust for a moment, "Windclan…."

Chestnutfur seemed to swell with pride, "very good! Now… how could you tell?"

"Well… they eat mostly rabbits. And just beyond that copse of trees there aren't any. Don't Windclan cats prefer the moore and not to be under the cover of anything?" Rainpaw asked.

Chestnutfur purred loud enough to vibrate the ground underneath

her, "that is correct! I suppose you payed attention to your elders then? I'm not surprised. Snowpaw and Cloudpaw could learn to do that as well."

Her voice was filled with jovial humor. Rainpaw frowned, scrunching up her face as she did. Chestnutfur tilted her head, confusion lighting her gaze. Before she was able to question why her apprentice looked as though she ate crowfood, a commotion snapped her thoughts away from Rainpaw.

The scent of iron filled Rainpaw's mouth. She shut it in disgust. Horror filled her as a small white form came crashing through the brush. The familiar gray and white pelt of her sister, streaked in red, was heaving in front of her.

"Cloudpaw?! What happened?!" Rainpaw gasped.

Chestnutfur dashed over, "trouble? Where?"

Cloudpaw was desperately sucking in air, "Trouble...with... Windclan."

Chestnutfur looked surprised, "we were almost to the border. What trouble? Was Redsong's patrol attacked?"

Cloudpaw just nodded and slumped to the ground. Rainpaw fretted over her as Chestnutfur looked around, "take Cloudpaw back to camp Rainpaw. Sunshine, go with her and warn the others. We may need backup."

Sunshine dipped his head in acknowledgement. He shouldered Cloudpaw up to him, and Rainpaw took the other side. Cloudpaw looked as though she didn't know where she was going as they half drug her to camp.

"What happened?!" Littlefoot gasped as he ran over, looking over Cloudpaw.

Sunshine swished his tail, "from what I can tell, a Windclan patrol attacked them. I must go and warn Lionstar."

Sunshine dashed out, leaving Rainpaw alone with her wheezing sister. Littlefoot offered some Juniper berries to Cloudpaw. He then walked over and sniffed at Rainpaw, "do you need any thyme? Are you feeling ok?"

Rainpaw nodded, "I'm fine, no need for any herbs."

Littlefoot dipped his head, before running to the back. Rainpaw assumed he was preparing for injuries. Cloudpaw finally was able to gasp out, "Rainpaw…. Snowpaw…. Is...in danger… she was hurt… in the patrol."

Fear sliced through Rainpaw. Her other sister was in the patrol as

well? Casting aside all rational thought, she slipped outside.

Without waiting for orders, Rainpaw dashed into the forest to go and help her sister before it was too late.

Allegiances

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Allegiances

Thunderclan:

Leader: Lionstar- large orange tabby with yellow eyes

Deputy: Chestnutfur- huge long furred tabby and white she cat with yellow eyes

Apprentice: Rainpaw

Medicine Cats:

Alderheart - dark ginger Tom with white tipped tail and amber eyes

Apprentice- Littlefoot - Small beige tabby tom with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Redsong - Small russet she-cat with dark orange eyes

Apprentice - Oakpaw

Bluesong - Small gray furred tom with blue eyes

Cedarpelt - White and gray striped tabby tom with brown paws and green eyes

Apprentice- Snowpaw

Sunshine- Yellow tom with green eyes and fluffy tail

Sparroweye- Brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Sweetflower- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes and a splash of white on her belly

Foxhunter - Long furred red pelted she-cat with a white tipped tail

Apprentice - Pinepaw

Honeysky- yellow tabby she-cat with green eyes

Doghunter- Long legged tan tom with striking yellow eyes

Strikeheart- short furred cream tom with black stripe going down his back

Stonewall - gray tom with light yellow eyes

Spottedwasp - cream colored she-cat with gray eyes and black spots all over her body

Apprentices:

Pinepaw- Silver tabby she-cat

Oakpaw - Brown tabby tom with green eyes

Cloudpaw- Gray and white fluffy she-cat with green eyes

Rainpaw- Silver long-furred tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Snowpaw- Pure white short furred she-cat with striking blue eyes

Elders:

Lilyheart- small dark tabby she cat with white patches

Ivypool - silver and white tabby she-cat with dark blue eyes

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Riverclan:

Leader: Pikestar- cream tabby tom with black stripes and huge paws

Deputy: Icesheet- small gray she-cat with blue eyes

Medicine Cat:

Riverspirit- Small gray she-cat with small paws

Warriors:

Marshfire - Huge brown tom with a cream belly and several scars scattered throughout

Fishface - Tabby tom with webbed feet and a pink nose

Lakespirit- pretty short furred gray she-cat with gray eyes

Apprentice: Greenpaw

Lionfish- Long furred black and white tabby tom with gold eyes

Gentlebreeze - Long furred white and gray tom with green eyes

Wavestorm - Fierce yellow she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice: Purplepaw

Mudspring - Brown tom with yellow eyes

Gullcry- White tom with orange paws and an orange spot on one eye

Smallflower - very small yellow furred she-cat with pink paws

Apprentice: Fiercepaw

Apprentices:

Fiercepaw- Tom with piercing yellow eyes and a black streak across his chest

Greenpaw- brown tortoiseshell she-cat with striking green eyes

Purplepaw- small tortoiseshell she-cat with Heather colored eyes

Queens:

Gillwhisker- Tabby queen with purpleish eyes (mother to Salmonkit, Whitekit, and Featherkit, Mate to Mudspring)

Smokeeye- Gray queen with milky eyes (Mother to Milkkit, and Swoopkit, Mate to Gullcry)

Elders:

Threelegs- She-cat with a mangled leg, retired early due to leg being crushed in mudslide

Memory - She-cat, sister to Threelegs, head was hit hard in a mudslide rescue, retired early due to balance and memory issues

Wishsky- Old tabby tom with yellow eyes

Sneezecloud- Long furred gray and white tom

Havenpelt - long furred black and white she-cat

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Shadowclan-

Leader: Needlestar- old grey she-cat with white chest and green eyes

Deputy: Nightshade- Black she-cat with yellow eyes

Apprentice- Roaringpaw

Medicine cat: Poisonspots- white and gray tom with brown almost red spots scattered throughout his body

Warriors:

Sagenight- white and black she-cat with yellow eyes

Apprentice: Twistpaw

Jadeheart- White she-cat with jade green eyes

Spikepelt- Spiky furred tom with a tuft of hair coming out of his

head

Velvetfur- pretty gray furred she-cat with blue eyes

Bogfall- brown and white tom with green eyes

Applecloud- russet furred tom with a fluffy tail

Apprentice: Boldpaw

Sleekshine- White tom with a reddish tail and paws

Apprentices:

Roaringpaw- Long furred yellow and orange tom with yellow eyes

Twistpaw- small black paw with a spiral design on his chest

Boldpaw- black tom with bright eyes

Queens:

Patchpath- patchy queen with green eyes ((mother to Mottledkit, Mate to Sleekshine))

Elders:

Snowbird- white she-cat with green eyes

Yarrowleaf- old she-cat

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Skyclan:

Leader: Violetstar- Black and white she-cat with yellow eyes

Deputy: Brokenheart- brown she-cat with black spots all over her body

Medicine cat:

Skyberry- rust and white she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice: Coldpaw

Warriors:

Sparrowskip- small brown tom with a splash of white on his chest

Ferretblaze- sleek she-cat with gray and white pelt

Apprentice: Copperpaw

Grayglow- soft gray she-cat with long legs and white paws

Seedflash- Tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

Pearfire- Cream tom with a pear shaped black spot on his back

Stormgaze- large gray tom with blue eyes

Littlebriar- small brown she-cat with yellow eyes

Apprentice: Deadpaw

Apprentices:

Deadpaw- Blunt tom with a gray pelt and green eyes

Copperpaw- light orange she-cat with yellow eyes

Elders:

Tree- old yellow tom ((mate to Violetstar-))

Hawkwing- gray tom with yellow eyes

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Windclan

Leader: Scorchstar- black tom with yellow eyes

Deputy: Sheepfur- long legged fluffy white tom with gray patches all over

Medicine Cat:

Windberry- Small shortfurred she-cat with pink paws and nose

Warriors:

Sanddream- Sand colored she-cat with yellow eyes

Sweetbriar- tortoiseshell she cat with gray eyes

Softwind- Soft furred white tom with green eyes

Apprentice: Stagpaw

Duststride- tan tom with smoky blue eyes and long legs

Plumdust- soft light brown she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice: Blackpaw

Tatteredmist- patchy calico she-cat

Twistedstorm- large pawed tom with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Stagpaw- long legged tom with yellow eyes

Blackpaw- midnight black tom with yellow eyes

Queens:

Quietdusk- mottled black and white she-cat (mother to Littlekit and Brindlekit, Mate to Twistedstorm)

Fernlily- Green eyed tan she-cat (mother to Rustkit and Ironkit, mate to Duststride-)

Elders:

Futuresight- small blind she-cat

Wheatwhisker- talkative light brown tom

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Cats and animals outside the clans

The Sparrows- group of all white cats with a sparrow feather on one ear

Private- german shepherd

Ace- small yellow tom with a bell

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

The forest was quiet as the patrol brushed against the leaves. Redsong swished her tail. Cloudpaw puffed a bit as she did her best to keep up. She sighed, her mentor didn't seem to care too much about her wellbeing. Cloudpaw just took it as a personal challenge, so she tried harder.

"Hey... don't push yourself," Snowpaw came trotting up, "just because Bloodpath always acts like he is a nest full of badgers, doesn't mean you should strain yourself for him."

Cloudpaw sighed, "I just...want to prove I can be the best warrior I can be-"

Her voice ended with a cough and Snowpaw put her tail lightly on her back before drawing it away. Bloodpath turned and snapped, "maybe you should stop chattering like a nest full of baby starlings and focus on hunting. You're going to scare off every piece of prey from here to Riverclan."

Redsong snapped suddenly, "I'll do you one better. Shut UP!"

Bloodpath grew quiet along with the two apprentices. Foxhunter caught up with them, stifling a purr of amusement, "how about we hunt near the Windclan border? It's been awhile since we've been that way."

Redsong dipped her head in agreement, "you are right. That would be a great good place to start on the apprentices hunting skills. Assuming they can shut their jaws for once. At least Pinepaw is ACTUALLY behaving…"

Pinepaw jumped at the sound of her name. Her gray pelt bristled a little and she turned away. Cloudpaw noted that Pinepaw had always been rather quiet… they hadn't even really played with her as kits too much.

The patrol headed towards the Windclan. Their paws brushing against the soft ferns and heavy greenery of the forest. It was so green after a harsh Leaf-bare. Cloudpaw noted how different it felt outside. The air stung less with each breath she took. It was easier to breathe, unlike Leaf-bare.

Redsong stopped suddenly, she threw her tail up, signaling the rest of the patrol to halt as well. Bloodpath looked around, his eyes narrowing to slits. Foxhunters fur bushed up. Cloudpaw took a breath in. She wrinkled her nose in disgust. What was that smell?

The ferns practically exploded as a tom leapt onto Bloodpath. Bloodpath let out a howl of pain as he disappeared under two cats. Redsong threw herself in front of the apprentices.

"AMBUSH!"

She too disappeared underneath two cats. Cloudpaw backed off. She had yet to know any fighting moves… What was she going to do?

She didn't have time to think. Cloudpaw ended up face to face with a black tom. He didn't appear to be as large as the warriors, so Cloudpaw assumed he was an apprentice. Cloudpaw gasped as he lunged at her and landed on top of her. Cloudpaw tried to shake him off as thorn sharp claws ripped into her back.

"Wow! I didn't know Thunderclan apprentices were this weak!" The black tom sneered.

The weight was suddenly lifted off of her. Cloudpaw found Bloodpath standing in front of her with teeth bared. He lashed his tail, "Cloudpaw! Go and find Chestnutfurs patrol, I think they were headed to the Windclan border."

Cloudpaw was wheezing and staring at the unmoving form of the Windclan tom. She shook her head and nodded, dashing into the ferns.

As she ran as fast as she could, her lungs burning for air, twigs crashed behind her. She turned to look briefly for a moment, expecting to see Snowpaw.

But the white she-cat wasn't behind her. It was a full grown light brown tom. He snarled and leapt into the air, intent on landing on her. A flash of gray intercepted him midair. Pinepaw had slammed into the tom and was now wrestling with the tom as Cloudpaw forced herself to go faster.

As she burst through the branches of a bush, she came face to face with Rainpaw. Rainpaw looked concerned, but if she meowed anything, Cloudpaw couldn't hear it. She desperately began to struggle for breath and managed to force out a few words. After finishing what she was saying, which she didn't even know, spots appeared at the edge of her vision.

'I'm going to pass out. I can't breathe….' Cloudpaw felt as though she were falling into a deep and dense pit.

Blackness swamped over her vision.

Cloudpaw found herself awakening as she was plopped into a bed of moss. She briefly heard some cats talking around her. Through the thick fog of exhaustion in her mind, she managed some thoughts,

'Why did Windclan come and attack us like that? I didn't hear that we had any troubles with them. Then again I wouldn't be too surprised if we did.

I hope Pinepaw is ok. That tom looked really strong and was probably a warrior. She did that for me?'

Cloudpaw was jolted from her thoughts by the soft tapping of a brown tom. Littlefoot was bent over here, "please, eat this. It will help your breathing… I'll have to see if there is any honey in the store. Alderheart is out looking for herbs with Honeysky right now…."

Cloudpaw ate the berry. It felt like a rock had dropped into her stomach as realization smacked into her. Snowpaw had been on the patrol with her too… and she didn't have the chance to see if she got away or not.

Her gaze flitted around the den. She wheezed out to Rainpaw who was standing there, "Snowpaw…. Was in the patrol… she may have… been hurt."

After that she focused on breathing. She saw her sisters tabby tail vanish through the entrance to the medicine den. She hoped Rainpaw would be able to make sure that Snowpaw was ok.

'Please… be ok. All of you…'

With that thought, Snowpaw let the scent of herbs wash over her as she drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

Snowpaw was being circled by a smaller cat at the edge of the battle. Her white pelt was slicked back with blood, and she felt the stinging of wounds all over her body. She was outclassed, having only known two moves that Oakpaw had taught her in passing.

In front of her, a long legged tom was hissing and lashing his tail. Snowpaw didn't have time to react as he darted in to scratch her. He landed a blow on her haunches and she hissed as her skin burst open with the ripping of claws. This tom was fast, way faster than

her.

Bloodpath raced past barreling into another warrior nearby. He was too distracted and she had no idea where Pinepaw and Cloudpaw were. The tom darted in again and sank his fangs into her back leg, she yanked it away, yowling in pain.

"Snowpaw, listen and follow lead," Snowpaw realized a tom was standing close to her.

The large ginger Tom was watching the long legged Windclan cat, he didn't dart in though. Snowpaw figured she was supposed to be learning some lesson from him, but Starclan the wounds he dealt hurt.

"When he darts in next time, go under him and heave up, he is getting ready to pounce…" the large tom ordered.

Snowpaw saw the long legged tom go in. As he raised a paw, she barreled into him and underneath. After she heaved upwards and sent him flying.

Snowpaw got lucky, he slammed into the trunk of a tree. She took the opportunity to leap on him and start ripping at his pelt. The Tom howled in agony and pushed her off, darting into the bushes. As she turned to pursue him, the large ginger Tom stated, "warriors don't need to kill to win battles!"

Snowpaw looked at him. She didn't recognize the tom at all. Who was he? Some sort of rogue.

Her thoughts were interrupted as she heard a Windclan warrior yell, "retreat!"

Suddenly she felt the rush of wind as warriors raced past. She nearly fell over. Blood was dripping from her wounds as she hobbled on three legs over to Redsong. The russet colored she-cat was mostly unharmed except for the tip of her ear being ripped open. Redsong looked her over, "Snowpaw, are you alright?"

She sniffed at her and sighed, "it doesn't look like anything fatal, but we will have to see about that leg. I'm sorry, I didn't expect those mangy Windclan cats to be here. I know you weren't prepared for your first battle-"

"But my apprentice did very well. She managed to chase off Stagpaw, and he is nearly a warrior." Cedarpelt came walking over.

Snowpaw looked around realizing that help had arrived just in time to scare off the Windclan warriors. Chestnutfur swished her tail, her normally light-hearted gaze was burning with fury, "I don't know what kind of fluff got into Scorchstars head that he would

attack an innocent hunting patrol with so many warriors…"

Redsong hissed, "we will have to get revenge."

Bloodpath nodded in agreement. Snowpaw felt horror nearly freeze the blood in her veins. Where was Cloudpaw?

Bloodpath answered the apprentice before she could ask, "I sent her to get help…"

"She made it…" Rainpaw was limping out of the trees with Pinepaw leaning on her rather heavily.

Snowpaw sighed with relief. Her gaze darted around as she went to thank the tom who had helped her, but he was nowhere to be seen. She walked up to Chestnutfur, "hey Chestnutfur… I wanted to thank the warrior that helped me. Do you know where he went?"

Cedarpelt, hearing this, answered in confusion, "you were fighting alone Snowpaw. No one was with you…"

Chestnutfur sniffed her, "let's get you all back to camp. Those injuries don't look good, and they could get infected if we aren't too careful."

Snowpaw winced. She was so certain another cat had helped her… Her mind wandered back to the time she had thought she had seen another strange cat in camp. As her thoughts drifted, fear took over. If she was going crazy, how would she ever be a real warrior? And if she wasn't… who were the mysterious cats she saw from time to time at the edge of her vision?

With Cedarpelt supporting her, Snowpaw shook it off again and headed back to camp with thoughts clouding her mind.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Rainpaw strode out into the clearing. She shook out her pelt and sighed. It was a rather sunny day, with dew dripping from the leaves encasing the warriors in their den. She was awake early for patrol, but also because she wanted to visit her sisters in the medicine den.

The skirmish on the Windclan border had been very unexpected. It left several cats with nearly severe injuries. Thunderclan had been doubling up patrols to make a statement they wouldn't be toyed with. Lionstar had decided not to retaliate, but rather he was going to take a patrol to the Windclan camp to speak with Scorchstar.

Rainpaw still wondered when the patrol would head over. It had been about three days since the skirmish with no sign of Lionstar holding true to that decision. Rainpaw found herself in front of the medicine den as her mind wandered.

"Ah, good to see you Rainpaw!" Littlefoot, the small brown medicine cat apprentice, was sitting inside the den and looking as cheery as ever, "Snowpaw and Cloudpaw have been as restless as ever since getting injured. Hopefully you can take their mind off of things. Redsong is getting quite irritated with them… but Pinepaw doesn't seem to mind too much. She enjoys listening, err I think."

Rainpaw twitched her whiskers in amusement. Pinepaw was always reserved and quiet, compared to Oakpaw who was as loud mouthed as Bloodpath when he was an apprentice. She could still see the russet tom striding around and boasting to the kits with his chest out how awesome of a cat he was.

A cough followed by an excited voice answered from the back, "Rainpaw! You came to visit?"

Rainpaw looked into the nest of her fluffy gray and white sister. She purred, "yes, how are you guys holding up?"

Snowpaw chimed in, "Alderheart says I can go back to light apprentice duties today! I just can't be too hard, so hopefully Cedarpelt has something planned!"

"I wish I was allowed to be back on apprentice duties. Bloodpath is always so irritated with me…." Cloudpaw rested her chin on her paws and let out a soft wheeze.

Snowpaw snorted, "maybe you should try putting your paw down. He is such a bossy furball, maybe you just need to be bossy back!"

A soft voice spoke up from the back, "She is right. I know from experience that you have to put your paw down. Oakpaw is my brother, and he is very aggressive from time to time."

Rainpaw found herself surprised that Pinepaw had spoken. They had rarely exchanged any words as apprentices or even as kits. Pinepaw was a lot closer to being a warrior than Rainpaw. Her gaze fell on the pale gray tabby warrior. Pinepaw looked away, her ears going back a little.

Snowpaw purred, "that even got Pinepaw riled up, and she doesn't usually get upset for any reason!"

Pinepaw sighed, "it isn't that I don't get upset about things, it's more that the conversation isn't important enough for me to put my energy into it. Plus, I feel like my opinions aren't going to be listened to, so why even try."

Cloudpaw looked at her as if she had grown a second head, "we would listen to you! I think you have been talking to Oakpaw too much!"

She ended with a cough. Rainpaw settled in and curled her tail around her paws neatly. As she went to open her jaws, a greeting was called at the entrance of the den. Chestnutfur pokes her rather large head in, "sorry… it's a bit crowded. Rainpaw, Lionstar would like for you to meet us in the clearing."

Rainpaw's heart dropped. Was she in trouble? She usually found herself to be a model apprentice. Her mind raced over the many things she could have done wrong. She merely dipped her head and turned to follow Chestnutfur out into the clearing. She waived her silver tail in goodbye to her sisters.

As Rainpaw walked into the sunlit clearing, her gaze fell on the golden pelt of Lionstar. His pelt shone in arrays of orange, yellow, and red. Though gray showed on his whiskers, he still held a strong and wise demeanor. Lionstar could definitely hold his own in battle and Rainpaw hoped to be a great a cat as he was someday.

Next to him sat the huge form of Chestnutfur. Her pelt was fluffed out and somewhat ungroomed. Her usual demeanor of humor still shone in her eyes. Next to her sat Sunshine, he waived his tail in greeting to Rainpaw. Bluesong and Alderheart were also sitting next to him. They formed a sort of semi-circle in the clearing.

Rainpaw took a seat next to her father. He let out a purr and briefly put his tail on his daughters back before turning his full attention on Lionstar. Lionstar looked around, "good, now that everyone is here, I can explain why I have chosen you all to accompany me to speak with Scorchstar."

Rainpaw's heart skipped a beat. She was going to Windclan?! Was she really that important of a cat to be invited? Her eyes must have been the size of owls, because Lionstar gave her a glance. He calmly stated, "I need to make a statement without… certain aggressive behaviors being involved. That's why I am choosing you five to come with me. I feel having strong yet wise warriors will help. That and Rainpaw, you need the experience and you were not in the skirmish that day. I do not feel as though they would be as threatened by such a new apprentice. No offense to you."

"None taken Lionstar," Rainpaw dipped her head.

It made sense to take warriors who weren't going to openly show aggression. Especially if Windclan decided to fight with tooth and claws. They would need a way out. Rainpaw shuddered, she didn't know any battle moves, and if worse came to worse…

Bluesong whispered, "don't worry. Your father and mentor won't let anything bad happen to you. I promise."

Rainpaw relaxed a little at that. The fur that had been bristling settled and she shifted a little closer to her father. This would at least be an exciting story to tell her sisters.

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The stream on the border slid along calmly. Rainpaw stared into it, noting the tiny fish that swam along. The grass underpass was fresh with health and the birds sung in the branches above. New leaf was a wonderful season, and Rainpaw was relishing it.

Sunshine tilted his head and asked questioningly, "why are we waiting at the border, Lionstar? Didn't they cross our borders?"

Lionstar purred, "you have a lot to learn still, young Sunshine. Patience is going to be key to that. We can't go crossing their borders on our own, we would be a threat. If we wait for a patrol to lead us, at least that is being courteous."

Rainpaw let out a small huff. Chestnutfur flicked her tail a bit, but didn't question Lionstar any further. Bluesong just shifted uncomfortably. Each one of them was aware this was a bigger patrol then necessary. Alderheart appeared to be calm, not portraying anything except for the flick of his tail tip.

'He's anxious. Surely Windclan wouldn't attack us if we have a medicine cat?' Rainpaw was looking over the border, feeling a bit more at ease.

After awhile, Rainpaw perked up her ears. She could see the vague shapes of cats, flowing like water over the moorland grass. Lionstar still remained as calm as the lake on a windless day. The cats were rapidly approaching and, as they got closer, Rainpaw could tell they weren't exactly happy with their Thunderclan neighbors. At the head was a long legged tom with curly hair. Behind him was a tom with smoky blue eyes who looked very irritated at the sight of the Thunderclan patrol. A long legged apprentice was heading up the rear with a tortoiseshell she-cat.

Lionstar waited until the long legged tom stopped by the border. The smoky eyed tom let out a his and surprisingly the tom slapped a tail over his muzzle. The tom lashed his tail and looked away with his tan fur bristling like individual sand grains on a stone surface. Lionstar dipped his head, "greetings, Sheepfur. It is good to see you are doing so well."

Sheepfur uncertainly answered, "you as well Lionstar. Why are you standing so close to the Windclan border?"

"Simple, there is a matter I must discuss with Scorchstar. May I perhaps be escorted to your camp?" Lionstar cocked his head to the side.

"Not with… so many warriors. I'm sorry, but striding into our camp with that many cats-"

Lionstar looked back, "Sunshine and Bluesong, you may head back to camp."

Bluesong and Sunshine looked surprised, but they merely dipped their heads and disappeared into the bushes behind them. Rainpaw shifted nervously, suddenly wishing she were the one sent home.

Sheepfur dipped his head, "I will lead, Duststride, and Stagpaw, you take the rear please. We don't want any issues with foxes after all."

Lionstar narrowed his golden eyes, but said nothing. Rainpaw started to follow the flank of Alderheart. He was definitely a little less calm before. All of their pelts, excluding Lionstars, seemed a bit ruffled. Rainpaw felt a shove from behind and let out a small hiss of annoyance. Stagpaw rolled his eyes, "hurry it up kit!"

Rainpaw didn't respond as she dashed up to be with Chestnutfur. She wasn't a lot, but she really didn't want to deal with the Windclan apprentice. Chestnutfur half smiled and murmured, "things will be ok. You can prove him wrong by showing what a brave apprentice you are in the face of so many enemies. Besides ….." she added a bit more quietly, "his legs may be long, but I have known Stagpaw to be a bit of a mouse-bain."

Rainpaw purred a little despite her uneasiness. Her mentor was making light of even a situation as awkward and terrifying as this one. Chestnutfur carried herself with confidence. A sudden flash of pride came over Rainpaw. Her mentor was a wonderful deputy and an even better teacher.

As they trotted over the moorland grass, Rainpaw shuddered. She couldn't imagine being this exposed. While she enjoyed the warmth of the ample sun, she couldn't imagine how dreary it was when it rained. It would probably soak a cat to the bone.

Upon coming to a rise, the patrol stopped. Confusion flashed in Rainpaw's gaze as she looked around. Chestnutfur leaned down and angled her head at some horse bushes, "that is their camp. They have it well hidden, and strengthen their barrier with horses to keep it safe. They may be exposed to the elements and not mind having their pelts open to the sky, but they are not stupid. Camouflage can be a cats best friend when it comes to things like badgers, fox's and even dogs. Use your nose and don't always trust your eyes."

Rainpaw nodded and sniffed the air, opening her mouth to breath in a scent. She wrinkled her nose in disgust as the sour scent of grass kissed her mouth. Her fur bristled and she jumped when Sheepfur suddenly returned over the rise. She hadn't even seen him go towards the entrance with how distracted she was. Sheepfur jerked his head, "you may enter the camp."

As the Rainpaw padded forward and squeezed herself between the gorse bushes, her pelt immediately bristled. Hostile looks from angry eyes were cast in her direction. Tails lashed and some cat let out a hiss. Scorchstar was sitting with his eyes narrowed to slits in the clearing. His tail was curled around his paws and he appeared to be icy calm. Stagpaw, Duststride, and Sweetbriar backed away from the cats.

Lionstar stepped forward, "greetings Scorchstar."

Scorchstar responded with a tone of caution, "Hello Lionstar. What brings you to my camp?"

There was venomous tension behind the words of Windclan's leader. His tail lashed briefly as he waited for a response. Rainpaw noticed two kits tumble out before their mother took them back into what she could only assume was the nursery. Lionstar responded, "I think you know why I am here. I want to know why you so badly maimed my new apprentices on the border. I understand one may have accidentally crossed but there was no reason for you to be that hostile."

Scorchstar sneered, "is your Clan really that easily beaten Lionstar? So much so you must come to my camp and talk to me directly?"

Chestnutfur scooted closer to Rainpaw. She appeared to have no emotion in her gaze. Rainpaw was more nervous than a dying hare. Hisses and bristling pelts surrounded her. She tried to remember some form of battle moves Bloodpath had taught her as a lot along with her sisters. Would they really have to fight their way out?

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Cloudpaw slowly arose from her nest. She let out a cough and shook out her pelt a bit. She was allowed to at least go for a walk in the forest. She felt the need to stretch her legs and she envied her white pelted sister as she cleared the elders den. A quiet voice spoke behind her, "Why don't you help me sort some herbs Cloudpaw?"

Cloudpaw looked up, "Maybe when I get back. I need to stretch my legs by going for a walk in the forest. I'm hoping a warrior will take me."

Littlefoot, the small brown tom, dipped his head in acknowledgement, "good. I wouldn't want you to go out there alone. You really shouldn't exert yourself too much. Say… have you e-"

Cloudpaw looked away quickly, "sorry I'll be back later."

She coughed slightly and walked out. She felt a flash of irritation go through her. She knew he was going to ask her to be a medicine cat apprentice yet again. Alderheart was getting older, but that didn't mean Starclan was going to take him anytime soon. Cloudpaw would be fine.

'I want to be a warrior. I don't want to sort herbs all day. Oh Starclan, why did you curse me with such a weak body?!' Cloudpaw sighed.

A rough voice suddenly spoke up, "You're up. Need to go for a walk?"

Cloudpaw was more than a little surprised when she turned and Bloodpath was standing there and looking at her, "it's about time. You're falling behind on training. Let's go for a walk and at least try to get you somewhere."

He whipped around and headed towards the thorn tunnel, slipping up the sides of the hollow and into the forest. Cloudpaw followed, huffing along. Bloodpath briefly glanced back before finding a soft patch of moss to sit on. Cloudpaw was more easily able to breath out here. She purred, enjoying the sun and birdsong. Little creatures rustled under leaves and she longed to try to hunt for her Clan.

Bloodpath nodded at another moss patch beside him and shook his head, "listen Cloudy, we need to talk."

Cloudpaw felt her fur bristle with indignation, 'Cloudy?!'

She sat down, her tail lashing briefly. She let out and irritated response, "what do you want to talk about?"

"Do you really want to be a warrior Cloudy? You wheeze every time your body exerts itself. You couldn't show any worth in battle and you barely have the stamina to even hunt. I honestly think being a medicine cat or retiring to the elders den would give you a more fulfilling life. Do you think I want you to die early?" Bloodpath was being frank, staring at her with an intense gaze.

Cloudpaw stared at him. Her gaze was unreadable. Everything was building up to a boiling point. Every warrior telling her she couldn't do it. Every cat looking down on her.

Taking a breath her fur bushed up until she was nearly three times her size. She glared daggers at Bloodpath and hissed, unleashing the fury of a full grown warrior, "I AM GOING TO BE A WARRIOR!"

She spat out the words, "I know everyone doubts me. My sister's, my mother, my leader and deputy. Starclan probably doesn't even believe in me. But, this is my life and my choice. No other cat can tell me how to live the life I want to live. No one believes in me, but I don't need that. The only thing I believe in is myself. I will be a warrior. I will be a cat others can believe in. I just need you to teach me!"

At the end she lashed out. Bloodpath just let it happen. If anything he was shocked. His orange eyes were open wide. Blood dripped from the scratch on his nose. He looked away. Was that shame?

Cloudpaw shook her head. What had she done? She turned suddenly and started running. She attacked her own Clanmate!

Wheezing she burst back into camp and ran into the apprentices den. She bundled into her nest and hid. She slammed her eyes shut and groaned.

Her chest hurt from the run home. Cloudpaw knew she had exerted herself to the point of pain again. She was only meant to do light duties. A run through the woods wasn't exactly light. Cloudpaw sighed. As her eyes fluttered open, she nearly fainted. A brown pelt was standing right in front of her.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry Cloudpaw! I didn't mean to startle you! I just noticed you charging back into camp and wanted to check on your breathing. Is that alright?" Littlefoot was standing there, looking awkwardly at the mossy nests.

Cloudpaw just nodded. She sat up in her nest, her eyes glittering with guilt. Littlefoot purred, "come with me, I'll do better in the medicine den!"

Littlefoot trotted across the clearing. It was a little empty. Spottedwasp was helping clean out the nursery and elders den. Her cream and black fur was dotted with green and brown from the moss. Snowpaw ran passed, holding a huge bundle of moss in her jaws. Her tail whipped to and fro and accidentally smacked Spottedwasp. Spottedwasp rolled her eyes and knocked over Snowpaw briefly. The two tussled before an irritated Oakpaw dashed up and barked at them to get it together.

Cloudpaw coughed briefly and entered the medicine den. She sighed and sat down. Pinepaw was doing some stretches in her nest. She looked up and dipped her head in greeting before continuing to exercise and stretch with Redsong. The hot tempered queen was muttering about one thing or another hurting. Littlefoot backed up out of a crack in the back. He was carrying a bundle of herbs blooming with life.

Littlefoot dropped it at her feet, "coltsfoot, a little honey, and a Juniper berry. This should have your breathing back to normal in

no time!"

Cloudpaw bent down and lapped up her herbs. She swallowed them and didn't wince at the bitter taste. She was used to taking them by now. She had ever since she was a small kit.

Movement alerted Cloudpaw to the entrance. Bloodpath was stalking in. He briefly glanced at Cloudpaw before walking up. Littlefoot took a look at his scratch, "my goodness! What happened?! Did you get into a fight with someone?!"

Cloudpaw felt a stone drop into her stomach. Her throat grew drier than a desert. Her eyes were looking over the scratch. It was coated in blood and Littlefoot licked it clean before examining it.

"Yeah. I got into a fight with a thorn bush…" Bloodpath looked away from Littlefoot.

Littlefoot looked shocked, "what?! A mighty warrior like you got into a fight with a thorn bush? I'm surprised you weren't hurt anywhere else!"

Bloodpath's fur bristled, "do I need herbs or not furball?!"

Littlefoot purred, "some marigold to prevent infection but it's not deep and it won't scar. Let me go ahead and get it for you!"

The Brown tabby turned and disappeared into the store of herbs. Cloudpaw was surprised. Why hadn't Bloodpath told on her? Was he saving it for something?

Littlefoot returned and chewed the plants up. He dabbed a small amount on the scratch and purred, "alright! It should be fine now. Be more careful from now on Bloodpath."

Bloodpath hissed and stormed out of the den. Cloudpaw decided to follow the irritated tom. He stopped, "what?"

Cloudpaw looked at her paws, "....why didn't you tell on me? Are you saving it? You can claw me back if you want!"

She screwed her eyes shut. Cloudpaw heard some shuffling. She

felt the soft tap of a cat paw on her nose. When she opened her eyes, Bloodpath was drawing his paw back and shaking his head. He still had a somewhat blank look on his face, "mouse-brain. I'm not going to claw you… I get it. You want to be a warrior. I'm not going to stand in your way of that. I'm your mentor, and as your mentor I will be supportive of you. I'll try better from now on."

With that he simply turned away and headed out into the forest. Cloudpaw was a bit surprised. She felt her pelt grow hot with embarrassment.

Finally someone had some respect for her and she purred as she headed back to the medicine den.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

As the piercing gazes fell on Rainpaw, she shifted closer to Chestnutfur. The large she-cat was ruffled, her gaze was nervous as she looked at the black cat in front of her. Scorchstar hissed, "well?"

Lionstar shook his head, "my Clan is strong. We just wanted some answers. Is your Clan struggling so much you wanted to maim some apprentices simply to have one piece of prey?"

Scorchstar lashed his tail and stepped forward, his yellow eyes blazing, "what would you know, you half-Clan hare brain?"

Lionstar's fur bristled a bit. Rainpaw looked confused. Lionstar was a half Clan cat?

"I may be half Clan, but my heart is that of a true Thunderclan warrior. At least I understand how to follow a simple code and be respectful to others. I think you need a lesson in courtesy Scorchstar." Lionstar retorted, twitching his tail slightly.

Scorchstar hissed suddenly and whipped around, "LEAVE MY TERRITORY!" He snapped, "I will give you three hare lengths head start, but you better run. We will not be pushed around by a clan of kittypets and rogues any longer!"

Lionstar dipped his head, he motioned at Alderheart, Chestnutfur, and Rainpaw to follow. Several cats snarled and hissed at them as they disappeared through the gorse tunnel.

Once outside, Lionstar looked behind him, "run!"

With that he was a flash of golden fur on the moore. Chestnutfur quickly followed after them. Rainpaw jolted and ran as well, doing her best to force her paws to run over the grass.

As she ran, she found herself gasping for air. Her lungs burned

and her legs soon began to grow tired. Chestnutfur glanced back, her eyes widened. Behind her, Rainpaw heard the battle cry of several Windclan warriors. That made her put on another quick burst of speed. Panic washed through her. Would Windclan really attack a medicine cat and her leader?

Rainpaw dared a glance behind her. Even with the world being a blur, she could see the vague shapes of cats gaining on them. Horror creeped through her as she realized Alderheart was falling more and more behind. She slowed her pace, allowing herself to be beside the medicine cat.

As they crossed the scent line, relief flooded through her. Alderheart crossed too and took a moment to relax. Suddenly a tan, white and black blur slammed into Alderheart. There was a loud hiss. Rainpaw started moving without thinking and knocked the calico over. She felt the cat slash her face. They began rolling over and over. The calico grabbed her scruff and heaved her, slamming her against a tree. Rainpaw felt the world swirl, she briefly saw a paw flash above her.

A gold pelt raced passed and the calico disappeared. Rainpaw was able to shakily get up.

"Tatteredmist!" Rainpaw heard Chestnutfur hiss.

"Thunderclan has had it too good for too long, you flea pelts deserved this!" Tatteredmist turned and ran over the border, disappearing onto the moore. Rainpaw could barely stand on her four paws, her head was swimming. A warm pelt pressed against her and murmured, "you hit your head pretty hard… lay down over here. We will get you back to the hollow as soon as we can."

Rainpaw slowly was able to take in the scene around her. Her blurry vision adjusted to see Alderheart standing over something. The lump of gold fur on the ground was twitching. Chestnutfur was bent over it. Rainpaw croaked, "what's going on?"

"Lionstar is hurt… we can't move him until I stop the bleeding. I need cobwebs…" Alderheart was pressing his paw down.

As Chestnutfur stepped away, Rainpaw was able to see Alderheart pressing down on a wound on the leader's throat. Blood was pooling underneath it. Rainpaw felt ice coarse through her veins at the sight.

Chestnutfur returned with a swath of cobwebs. Alderheart took them and quickly placed them on the wound. After a moment he nodded to Chestnutfur, "please carry him back to the hollow. Be careful about it. The wound is very bad."

Alderheart returned to Rainpaw. She frowned, "Will Lionstar be ok?"

Alderheart looked uncertain and avoided her gaze, "lean onto me at least until we get back to the hollow. I need to make sure your bump on the head isn't too serious."

Rainpaw sighed and decided not to ask anymore questions. She stood up, shaking the dizziness from her head. Leaning against Alderheart they made their way through the sunny forest.

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Rainpaw kneaded the ground,uncertainly, in front of her. Her eyes wandered back to the medicine den once again. Redsong came limping over, her eyes blazed a fierce orange, "We should have never even given Windclan a chance. If anything we should go and rip out the throats of those fox hearts."

Spottedwasp passed by and shook her head, "while I agree, I think we should at least wait and see if Lionstar will be ok. We can't just go and attack another Clan without our leader. Or, at least, without some guidance."

Redsong snorted and rolled her eyes. She limped back over to the warriors den. Rainpaw sighed, she lowered her head. Maybe if she had been a little faster, Lionstar would be ok. Maybe he wouldn't be lying unconscious in the medicine den. Maybe….

"Hey," Cloudpaw's voice interrupted her thoughts, "I heard what happened. Are you ok? I can't believe Windclan would just attack

like that! A medicine cat was even with you… "

Rainpaw kept staring down at her paws. Guilt was rising up within her. She could feel her sister staring at her with concern. She flicked her tail, unsure if she should confide in Cloudpaw or not. She decided on a half honest answer, "I got slammed into a tree and my head got hit, but it wasn't anything serious. Alderheart just wants me to take it easy for a day…"

Cloudpaw gave her ear a reassuring lick, "that's good to hear. Will Lionstar be ok?"

Rainpaw sighed, "I'm not sure…. No one is allowed in the medicine den right now. Littlefoot and Alderheart are working to help him."

Cloudpaw shook her head. Her green eyes glittered with worry. Rainpaw felt a pelt on her other side press against her. Snowpaw had snuck up without her noticing and was sitting there quietly. Some green sprigs still stuck to her pelt. The three sisters just sat in silence and waited.

Littlefoot came running out of the den. He was looking around, his striped tail lashing back and forth. Alarm spread through Rainpaw. Why was he looking so scared? Was it that bad?

Littlefoot dashed over to Spottedwasp. The dotted warrior quickly followed after Littlefoot. After a moment, Chestnutfur emerged along with Spottedwasp. In between them, Lionstar was limping. Rainpaw restrained herself from running over. She knew Lionstar didn't want to be crowded.

Chestnutfur and Spottedwasp were making slow progress towards the Highledge. Lionstar was looking determined, but a lot weaker than his normally strong demeanor. Cobwebs were swathed around his golden neck. Several curious cats stuck their head out. Redsong emerged from the warriors den. Her gaze narrowed to slits.

It was slow progress as they made their way to the top. Lionstar nearly slipped a few times. Finally when they reach the top of the rocks, Lionstar slumped down. He opened his jaws but his eyes

grew wide and he coughed. Chestnutfur leaned in, apparently to whisper something to him. Lionstar nodded. Chestnutfur stepped forward, raising her fluffy head to the sky, "let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Rainpaw found her way over to the Highledge. Snowpaw and Cloudpaw stuck close to her. Thunderclan cats poured from their places to come and see what was going on. Ivypool sat just outside the elders den with Lilyheart. Bloodpath came dashing over from the thorn tunnel. He smelled of the forest and had obviously just come from somewhere outside.

Chestnutfur curled her tail around her paws. Lionstar was barely sitting up with her but his eyes swept over the clan. The light of the setting sun illuminated him, turning his pelt almost radiant. The sun brought out the browns of Chestnutfur's pelt.

"As you all know by now, Lionstar was badly injured by Windclan. We do not know why they have been so aggressive lately, but we have decided we will strengthen our patrols. Unfortunately that means everyone will be putting in extra work.

Next, we need to work on the apprentices battle training. They need to learn as much as they can over the coming moons. If Windclan are going to be that aggressive with us, then we need to make sure we put up the proper defensive measures back." Chestnutfur started.

Bloodpath hissed, "I say we head over to Windclan ourselves and rip the pelts off of those rancid dung eaters!"

Rainpaw looked back down at her paws. She felt the guilt rise up. She couldn't protect her leader and now everyone else was stepping up to prove they could do a better job at it.

Redsong suddenly added, "I say we claw their eyes out of their sockets and-"

Chestnutfur snarled, "we will NOT be taking action against Windclan yet. For now, we will strengthen our patrols, and

prepare."

Bloodpath lashed his tail, "we can't just stand around and let them walk all over us! How could we? Then they will claim all of our territory from woods to woods!"

Chestnutfur hissed, "would you go against your leader and risk your Clanmates for simple revenge?!"

Bloodpath sighed and silenced himself. He looked away. Rainpaw could see a whisper of a smolder written across his face. She looked back up at Chestnutfur. Lionstar was looking at his deputy with pride on his face.

Chestnutfur looked back, "I will soon be down to organize some evening patrols. I would also like one night patrol, just in case. No cat is to go out alone, especially apprentices. Travel in groups of at least three or more!"

With that, the deputy turned and helped Lionstar into the leader's den. Rainpaw shuffled her paws again and turned to speak with Cloudpaw and Snowpaw. She found Cloudpaw's spot empty, but Snowpaw was there, looking bright eyed, "are you ok Rainpaw? I heard you pretty much saw everything happen. Do you want to share a piece of prey with me?"

Rainpaw purred a little, trying to hide her nervousness. She dipped her head, "I would love to. Where is Cloudpaw? Does she want to share?"

Snowpaw looked up and shook her head, "it looks like Bloodpath needed her for something, so she is probably busy training. I'm sure we can share a mouse or something tomorrow."

Rainpaw nodded. She followed Snowpaw to the fresh-kill pile. But one thing kept crossing her mind. Would Lionstar really be ok? And how many lives did her leader have left?

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

The forest was dappled with sunlight. Greenleaf was nearing and New leaf would soon be over. Birds whistles happily in the trees. Squirrels were chattering in the branches above. A slight breeze brushed against the tops of the trees like a gentle caress.

The silence was broken by the loud mouthed tabby apprentice, "I don't see why we aren't battle training with Cloudpaw and Rainpaw. Why do we have to help gather stupid herbs?"

Littlefoot seemed a bit taken aback. The white furred she-cat next to him snapped, "Be quiet Oakpaw! Don't be mean to Littlefoot or I with hide a thorn in your nest and he won't treat it!"

Oakpaw snapped back, "He has to mouse-brain!"

Littlefoot suddenly let out a purr, "or I could recommend you don't go to the gathering tonight, Oakpaw!"

Oakpaw grew silent.

The three cats trekked through the woods. It was more of a carefree hike, down to the lakeside to pick up herbs. Littlefoot had explained they were trying to find mallow.

'It has bigger leaves. It will also have little purple flowers beginning to bloom at the top. You want to bite down on the end of the stems. Be careful not to touch your tongue to it too much. You will be numb for a few days if so…'

Snowpaw kept that in mind the closer they got to the lakeshore. Oakpaw halted suddenly, his ears angling up. His head snapped up in confusion, "do you hear that?"

Snowpaw shut her eyes, she listened for the sound. Surprise came through her. She could hear what sounded like a light buzzing.

Littlefoot angled his ears up too, excitement lit his gaze, "Oh I hope that's what I think it is…."

The trio followed the source of the noise. Snowpaw stopped. About halfway up a large oak tree was what appeared to be a mass of tiny moving bodies.

"Yes! That's a beehive!" Littlefoot was practically shaking with excitement, "honey lasts forever and is so good for sweetening things and relieving sore throats! We are running low and it would do us wonders to get our paws on some."

Oakpaw looked uncertain, "so you want me to just stick my muzzle into a beehive?!"

Snowpaw ignored them. They were beginning to speak back and forth eagerly. A flash of irritation rushed through her and she flicked her white tail.

Cedarpelts training echoed in her mind:

"Your pelt does not help you camouflage yourself, especially in trees!" The gray tom stated bluntly to Snowpaw, "that being said we will need to work out something else. There are far more ways to be sneaky and collect fresh kill than just camouflage. You will be fine in the Leaf-bare snow, but you must become like it as it falls to the floor. As silent and gentle as possible."

Snowpaw nodded. Cedarpelt thought long and hard for a moment, "I'm going to shut my eyes, I want you to try to sneak up on me. Work out how you can do that without making me notice you are there."

Snowpaw nodded, "but won't you see where I am going?"

"Not with my eyes shut. Do your best Snowpaw…" with that, Cedarpelt shut his leaf green eyes.

Snowpaw looked around. Her brain was moving as fast as a soaring hawk. How could she sneak up on her mentor without him noticing?

Setting her paws down as lightly as she could, she vanished into the trees. Her pelt barely brushed against the fragrant leaves around her. She may have stuck out like a snowy hair in a sea of green, but if she could be quiet enough.

'I need to be like...like a whisper! Present, but loud enough for only the wind and me to hear!' Snowpaw slipped through the grass.

"Try setting your paws down more lightly, I can't see you but I can hear where you are going." Cedarpelt instructed.

Snowpaw didn't let out the frustrated sigh she wanted to. She set her paws down so lightly she didn't even think a dead leaf would crumble under their soft touch. Ever so slightly she snuck around to the opposite side of her mentor. Cedarpelt spoke up, "I am opening up my eyes now."

The tom opened his eyes, he perked up his ears.

Silence.

Snowpaw decided to wait for awhile, rather than leap at the tom. Maybe it would throw him off a little.

Cedarpelt eventually spoke up, "are you jumping anytime soon Snowpaw?"

The silence still clung to the air, only interrupted by the sound of bird song.

Snowpaw tensed her muscles and leapt. She barreled into Cedarpelt, rolling over and over in the leaf mold. When she got up, her pelt look like she had become part of the forest floor. Cedarpelt stood up and shook out his pelt, "that was excellent work!"

Snowpaw purred, "So I did good?"

Cedarpelt purred back, "you did good but there are still several things you need to work on. Follow me and I will do my best to teach them to you."

Snowpaw was jolted back to the present as Oakpaw lashed his tail

in frustration, "I'm going up there!"

"Not without a solid plan. Those bees must be crawling around in your brain already, you don't need them crawling on your pelt too!" Littlefoot retorted.

Like a flash of white lightning, Snowpaw made her way up the tree. She was just a streak of white as she made her way up the leafy branches. She heard Littlefoot give a cry of distress.

When Snowpaw was level with the bee's nest, loud enough to hear the buzzing in his head. Her ears flicked as the bee's flitted to and fro. Snowpaw was trying to work out what to do. Through the swarms of bodies, she could see the precious golden liquid oozing under combs of bees wax.

'I better hurry or I'm going to get myself covered in stings…'

Snowpaw lashed out her paw, using a technique that Cedarpelt had taught her gathering moss. She had to work a little harder to work the comb off. Some of it dropped off.

Then the pain started.

Stings ran up her paws. She let out a slight yowl and made her way down the tree as fast as she could. Bees were following her in droves. She found herself running but the bee's still pursued her. Thinking fast she made it to the lakeshore and dove in.

Snowpaw churned her legs through the water, making sure not to go into an area she couldn't fully touch. The lake was clean and crisp and the cool water soothed her stings. The only thing interrupting the clarity was the kicking of her legs as she hit the bottom. Sand swirled up into the water, along with the bodies of several bees.

After a minute she sat up and gasped. The swarm was gone, unable to follow her without drowning. She made her way to the shore, shaking out her snowy pelt. She began to clean herself as she heard the soft foot falls of Littlefoot. Oakpaw was following. In his jaws was a honeycomb wrapped in a leaf. Littlefoot dipped his

head, "Let me collect a few stems of mallow and then we can head back to camp!"

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"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!" Chestnutfur yowled.

Cats gathered around below, their eyes glowing with excitement. Snowpaw perked her ears up, her tail swaying a bit. Chestnutfur must be ready to announce the cats going to the Gathering!

Chestnutfur looked down, "tonight is the usual gathering of the five clans! I will be taking, Spottedwasp, Bluesong, Sweetflower, Sunshine, Bloodpath, Cloudpaw, Rainpaw, and Snowpaw!"

"What about Lionstar?" Bloodpath asked, tilting his head, "is he coming?"

"I will be acting leader tonight. Lionstar isn't well enough to come with us…. But I have been requested to bring an acting deputy. I choose Cedarpelt." Chestnutfur stated as she looked around.

Cedarpelt dipped his head, "it would be my honor, Chestnutfur."

Chestnutfur dipped her head in return, "the meeting is over. Please eat so you all have the strength for the gathering tonight."

Rather than leaping down, she disappeared back into the leader's den. Alderheart walked out, his eyes shining with exhaustion. He made his way down into the medicine den, his tail trailing in the dirt behind him.

Snowpaw frowned, 'How sick is Lionstar? Is the wound that serious?'

Sighing, she shook her head and headed over to the fresh-kill pile. Cloudpaw came rushing up, "are you excited for our first gathering?!"

"Yes!" Snowpaw purred, "we get to meet the other Clans!"

"We already met Windclan and they are not very….kind…" Rainpaw padded up, choosing a mouse from the pile.

Cloudpaw sighed, "hopefully Windclan will behave…. Those are some mouse hearted cats."

Rainpaw settled in next to Snowpaw. Her sister was usually quiet, but never this quiet. Her gaze was almost sulky and her tail flicked as she bit into her mouse. Another cat came walking over and settled beside Cloudpaw. Snowpaw was more than a little surprised to see Bloodpath, who usually ate alone.

"Hey Rainpaw…." Bloodpath grumbled through a mouthful of sparrow.

Rainpaw looked up, surprised at the toms sudden appearance. He tilted his head, his red-orange eyes filled with some sort of understanding, "you know it's not your fault right?"

Rainpaw was about to open her mouth to reply when Chestnutfur waived her tail, "Everyone, it's time to go."

Bloodpath groaned, "Couldn't even finish my sparrow. Mouse dung…."

He stood up and stretched, kicking dirt over the remainder of his sparrow. Snowpaw quickly finished her prey and stood up as well, running over eagerly. Cedarpelt gave his apprentice a warm look, enjoying the excitement in her eyes. Rainpaw padded up, looking a little wary and tired. This was followed by Cloudpaw who was practically bouncing through the air.

"Contain yourself! You're a cat not a rabbit!" Bloodpath snapped.

"I'm allowed to be excited, at least I'm not a grumpy furball like you!" Cloudpaw quickly disappeared into the small crowd of Thunderclan cats.

Bloodpath hissed, "you will pay for that!" As he dove after her.

Chestnutfur took the lead as Snowpaw ran to catch up to Cedarpelt. Rainpaw caught up with Chestnutfur and they appeared

to be talking in low voices. Snowpaw looked up, "what is a Gathering like?"

"All five Clans come together under a truce to share news. Although please don't share too much with other Clans. We do not want to look weak to them…" Cedarpelt told his apprentice firmly.

Snowpaw nodded. Her blue eyes glistened with worry. She knew that Cedarpelt was referring to the incident that happened on the Windclan border. She knew she couldn't make Lionstar look weak. Her tail lashed, "I don't understand why those mange-pelts did that to Lionstar anyway. He is a fair and kind leader. He would never lay a paw on a cat who didn't intend to harm him first."

"Starclan knows, but I have a feeling I know what this so called skirmish is about." With that, Cedarpelt drew ahead and was replaced by Cloudpaw, who was bursting at the seams with excitement.

As the Thunderclan cats trekked through the forest and down to the lakeshore, Snowpaw couldn't help but admire the calm. Fireflies flitted about, illuminating the luscious greenery around them. The forest was a place full of wonder and mysteries. The darkness here didn't feel threatening, it felt inviting and protective.

Heading down to the shore, Snowpaw played with the smooth pebbles under her paws. The lake was calm as glass, reflecting the light of the moon and the shadows of the felines as they walked under it. Silverpelt gleamed brightly above them, showing their protection in the best way they could.

Snowpaw's attention was snapped away when a flash of russet fur collided with her sister, bowling her over into the water. She flailed around for a bit before finally getting to her paws. She looked like a gray and white drowned rat, "Hey! No fair Bloodpath!"

Bloodpath lashed his tail, "what have I told you before? Be prepared for any attack!"

Although his tone of voice was aggressive, Snowpaw could see the light-heartedness in his gaze. Chestnutfur snapped suddenly, "quit

acting like kits please! We want to make sure the other Clans know we raised proper warriors!"

Cloudpaw coughed and ran back up, shaking her fur and splashing Snowpaw with the droplets before answering, "yes Chestnutfur!"

Bloodpath mumbled a quick "sorry" before falling in beside Spottedwasp. Snowpaw sighed, "did you HAVE to get my pelt all wet too?"

Her sister purred and pressed against her, "of course! We're sisters, so we share everything! Including inconveniences!"

"You didn't inconvenience Rainpaw!" Snowpaw retorted.

Cloudpaw purred, "she's been sad and grumpy lately, so… I chose you!"

Snowpaw shook her head and sighed. Up ahead, shadows were slinking onto what looked like a tree, leading from the shore to a small island in the middle of the lake. Chestnutfur signaled for her Clan to halt as the scent of Windclan hit the back of their throats.

"We wait till they are finished crossing…" Chestnutfur murmured.

Once the last shadow hopped down from the bridge and disappeared into the brush on the shore of the island, Chestnutfur waived her tail for them to go. Cedarpelt hopper up, he looked down with his leaf green eyes sparkling. Snowpaw looked up nervously at the twisted roots. Cedarpelt called out, "don't worry! Just jump and keep your balance! It's easier than balancing on a tree branch!"

Snowpaw nodded, she leapt up, looking for a pawhold. Making her way through the entangling roots, teeth met her scruff and Cedarpelt pulled her to the top. She gulped, as she began carefully walking along the smooth bark without glancing down.

It happened all at once. One paw slipped and then the other three followed. Snowpaw gasped as she slid down into the dark depths of the water. She shut her eyes.

Flailing around in the dark, she desperately tried to reach the surface. Forcing her eyes open, she could see the light of the moon filtering down above her.

'It's so peaceful down here… I could stay forever!'

As her lungs screams for air, teeth suddenly met her scruff, once again. She felt herself being lifted upward and her head broke the surface in an array of drops. She gasped for breath and coughed. The water made her sense of smell too weak to identify her savior, but they were good at swimming as the stranger pulled her strongly to shore.

Once on the shore, she lay down, gasping for air. She blinked the water fully from her eyes and looked at her savior.

He was a very muscular tom cat. Scars streaked his pelt and he was giving her an almost bored expression.

"Snowpaw! Are you alright?!" Chestnutfur came running over, "Great Starclan! I'm so glad Riverclan was here to help you out! Thank you Marshfire!"

The large tom dipped his head. For the first time, Snowpaw could smell a fishy scent coming from the stranger. She wrinkled her nose in disgust but Cedarpelt came dashing over, dipping his head to the Riverclan tom, "thank you for saving my apprentice, I suppose she is still a little clumsy on her paws."

Marshfire shrugged, "it was fine. If you will excuse me…"

He pushed passed the other two Thunderclan cats and dashed up into time to meet a stream of larger fishy smelling cats coming from the tree bridge. Cloudpaw ran over, she looked scared and licked her sisters ear, "are you ok Snowpaw?!"

Rainpaw came bounding over, "I saw you slip in. Luckily Riverclan was arriving next so… looks like they saved your tail!"

Snowpaw ducked her head in embarrassment but Cedarpelt purred in laughter, "Apprentices make mistakes, anyway we better head in. I think we are last to arrive."

Snowpaw nodded and shook out her pelt as she eagerly dashed through the undergrowth. Upon reaching the clearing she saw so many different cats mingling beneath a rather large tree at the center of the island. Scents drifted to her nose, confusing her for a bit. She cocked her head to the side, not really feeling nervous but more curious.

Cloudpaw shuddered, "wow… who knew so many cats existed in the world."

She pressed against the small blueish warrior next to her. Bluesong purred, "no worries little one. This is a peaceful gathering, if you would like I can introduce you to a few warriors!"

Cloudpaw shrunk down, "o...ok!"

Snowpaw watched as Cloudpaw followed her father down to the clearing. She scanned over the crowd, noticing several skinny cats standing away from the other Clans. Her eyes fell on the tom that had rescued her earlier and as she headed down, she nearly lost him in the mixing of all the scents.

She briefly saw Rainpaw, speaking with what looked like another apprentice. Snowpaw was so distracted, she ran into a cat.

"Oof! Hey! Watch it!" The she-cat lashed her tail and looked her over with a hard green stare.

Snowpaw felt her fur grow hot with embarrassment, "I'm sorry… I…. It's my first gathering!"

"Oh! Ok that makes a lot of sense. No offense but you looked super lost. Do you need help? I can probably help navigate a bit!" The young she-cat leaped up eagerly.

"Uhhh sure?" Snowpaw answered.

"You can come sit with me and Marshfire if you want! My name's Greencloud! I just got my warrior name!" Greencloud led Snowpaw through the group of cats.

"My name is Snowpaw!" Snowpaw followed along cheerily,

remembering the tom that saved her's name.

A tingle of excitement flashed through her to see Marshfire again. How did he get his scars? Why was he so gruff and quiet? Why did it seem like a lot of cats were avoiding him?

Greencloud came hopping down, "hey, Marshfire!"

Marshfire grunted and turned around, his muscles rippling under his pelt. He flicked his tail slightly at the tip. Snowpaw had to tilt her head a bit to look up at him. Greencloud purred, "I made a new friend and drug her over here! Her name is Snowpaw!"

Marshfire looked away, "we've met…." Is all he meowed.

Greencloud snorted and plopped down next to him, "what an antisocial furball! Can't you be a little more talkative?"

Marshfire just shrugged. Snowpaw let out a "mrrrow" of laughter. She didn't mind these fishy smelling Riverclan cats. They were actually kind of funny.

Suddenly, one of the cats on the tree yowled to the Gathering below. It was a command for total silence. Snowpaw wrapped her tail around her paws, she leaned in, "could you tell me the leader's and deputies so I can follow along?"

Greencloud nodded, "Yes! The one about to speak is Violetstar! She is the leader of Skyclan! You're Thunderclan right? Don't you share a border with Skyclan?"

Snowpaw nodded and shuffled her feet, "yes but I've never seen her before."

Her gaze fell on the black and white leader. Her lithe form stood proudly on the branch of the tree. Her voice echoed out, "Skyclan has been flourishing in New leaf! I think it is a blessed season for all! We have one new apprentice, Coldpaw! He will be training under the guidance of Skyberry, to be Skyclan's next medicine cat!"

The cats in the clearing yowled, "Coldpaw! Coldpaw!"

Snowpaw had to strain to see what he looked like. There was a rust colored she-cat with blue eyes, playfully flicking her tail over the ears of a smaller gray tom with black tufted ears.

"Their deputy's name is Brokenheart. She is the she-cat at the base of the tree! Next to her is Nightshade! That's Shadowclan's deputy!" Greencloud explained.

Snowpaw had to strain to see the two cats. One was a brown she-cat with black spots all over her body that reminded Snowpaw a bit of Spottedwasp's. Next to her was a skinny black she-cat with bright yellow eyes.

"Needlestar is next, careful… she can be a bit cranky!" Greencloud murmured.

Marshfire flicked her over the ears with his tail, making Snowpaw let out a snort. A cat nearby hissed, "be QUIET!"

Snowpaw ducked her head a bit but Greencloud looked defiant. She shook her head and huffed, sticking her nose up.

An old and battle torn gray she-cat with a white chest stepped up, she glared around. Snowpaw felt herself shy away under the hard gaze. Needlestar rasped, "Shadowclan has been blessed this Newleaf! We have one new kit in the nursery born to Sleekshine and Patchpath! We are looking forward to Mottledkit eventually becoming an apprentice! We did however smell a fox recently near our border with Thunderclan. We wished to warn you to prevent further mishaps in the future!"

With that Needlestar stepped back, being replaced with another large and familiar figure. Greencloud leaned in, "I'm sure you know Chestnutfur… but who is the cat on the roots next to Nightshade?"

Snowpaw puffed out her chest, "that's Cedarpelt! He's my mentor!"

Marshfire suddenly chimed in, "I have heard of Cedarpelt. I hear he is an excellent fighter and a cunning warrior."

Snowpaw felt her fur flush with embarrassment, "he is a great mentor…."

Marshfire looked at her directly suddenly, "I'm sure you will be a great warrior then."

Snowpaw shrunk under his gaze. For some reason, hearing a compliment like that from a warrior made her feel all giddy. Her heart soared with butterflies. Greencloud gave her a funny look, but didn't add anything.

"Thunderclan is doing well! We have lots of prey in the forest, and with prey, brings us new warriors in the making! We welcome Snowpaw, Cloudpaw, and Rainpaw as apprentices to Thunderclan at last!" Chestnutfur purred.

Snowpaw once again puffed out her chest. She briefly saw Rainpaw ducking her head in embarrassment.

"Where is Lionstar?" A pure black tom next to Chestnutfur suddenly asked, "I don't suppose there is sickness in Thunderclan?"

Chestnutfur looked at him, her eyes burning like wildfire, "Thunderclan is as strong as ever."

Chestnutfur was very guarded right now. Snowpaw recognized the pitch black tom as Scorchstar. Her ears flattened and she shuddered as she remembered the Windclan warriors attacking her at the border.

Scorchstar retorted, "yes, a Clan full of strays, kittypets, and rogues is a strong one. You're holding your Clan together real well."

Chestnutfur slid out her claws and trembled a little. She was very clearly trying to keep calm, her fur bristling all over. Bloodpath sprang up, "The only rogues are you Windclan crow-food eaters who attacked innocent cats!"

"Your innocent cats crossed my border! Shouldn't you have more control over your warriors, Chestnutfur?" Scorchstar spat.

Yowls and accusations suddenly were being thrown around. Snowpaw found herself ducking her head and trembling. Marshfire pressed against her suddenly and she flinched, but then relaxed, enjoying the comfort of the large tom.

"ENOUGH!" A cream tabby cat with striking black markings cried from the branch, "Starclan is growing angry!"

Snowpaw ducked her head and looked up as cloud began to look above. She shivered. The clans finally died down with their bickering.

"That's our leader, Pikestar. Some say he is descended from Riverstar himself." Marshfire's voice was filled with pride as he described his leader, "That is our deputy Icesheet."

Snowpaw perked her head up once again and caught glimpses of some of the most strikingly blue eyes she had ever seen. Her fur was blistering white, except for her paws and tail which had a touch of gray. A pink scar marred one side of her delicate facial features.

Pikestar looked between the two leader's, "are you quite done Scorchstar?"

Scorchstar let out a hiss of annoyance but looked away before Pikestar continued, "We have three new warriors with us tonight, Purple-eyes, Greencloud, and Fiercestrike!"

Greencloud stuck up her nose with pride as Snowpaw joined in the chanting for her.

Pikestar added, "We also have two new apprentices, Swooppaw and Milkpaw!"

Snowpaw couldn't see where Swooppaw was, but nearby she could see a cream colored she-cat with her tail curled around her paws. She was looking shyly down, as if the chanting was much too embarrassing for her to handle. Next to her was a rather large tom with long hair and striking stripes all throughout his fur.

Marshfire looked around, "Swooppaw is my apprentice, I am unsure where he went off to though."

Greencloud sighed, "yeah… he is a bit of a troublemaker."

Marshfire grunted and grew silent again. Snowpaw could still cut the tension between Windclan and the rest of the groups in the air

with a claw.

Scorchstar stepped up next, his tail lashed as he looked around the clearing, "Windclan is the strongest it has been in moons. We welcome Fernlily to the nursery along with Ironkit and Rustkit!"

Greencloud snorted, "unusual names…"

Scorchstar glared around the clearing, "Windclan is prepared for any kind of storm heading our way. Our prey is plentiful and we are strong!"

Marshfire muttered something under his breath. Greencloud shook her head and whispered, "I'm sure you know the mouse-heart, Scorchstar, judging by the look your clan is giving him. He has been nothing but trouble over these past moons. I guess Riverclan wasn't the only Clan involved…"

Snowpaw nodded. She suddenly saw the black tom leap off of the giant tree and jerk his head to motion his warriors to leave the island. Scorchstar clearly didn't want to be there. It was more of a traditional thing for him at this point.

Pikestar sighed and meowed before he leapt down, "you may all talk for a minute but then we must head back to camp!"

Chestnutfur leapt down, and Cedarpelt followed in her wake. Snowpaw sighed, looks like they would be leaving first then.

"Snowpaw…" the deep and gruff voice of Marshfire called softly, "may we meet again next gathering."

Something about what he meowed made prickles go up and down her pelt. She put on a burst of excitement as she followed the rest of Thunderclan back to their territory.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Rainpaw was following her mentor down to the training hollow. Ever since Windclan had become increasingly aggressive, Chestnutfur had been trying to shove in battle training on top of extra patrols. It was exhausting, but Rainpaw could now feel the muscles rippling beneath her coat. She had grown a lot stronger and more confident in the past moon.

On the other paw, Lionstar was struggling. Rainpaw felt guilty wash over her at the thought of her once powerful clan leader. He was back in the camp now, desperately fighting off infection. Lionstar had been a golden bundle of fur wrapped up in the medicine den since the day after the attack. Alderheart was constantly watching over him, and his supply of marigold was becoming fewer and fewer with each passing day.

Rainpaw shook her head. She needed to focus on the training and not her own guilt.

In the clearing, Oakpaw was sitting with his eyes rolled up to the sky. Redsong was pacing around, clearing ready to get started while Pinepaw sat next to him with her eyes closed right. Foxhunter gave a long stretch and purred, "there they are."

Chestnutfur dipped her head, "I apologize, I had to finish out another patrol. But I am here now. What shall we work on today?"

Oakpaw looked up eagerly, "I think I already know a lot of battle moves. Can we try a hard one?"

Foxhunter gave him a look. Her eyes glinted, "how about we spar then? If that is alright Redsong?"

"I don't mind. Claw his ears off Fox!" Redsong snorted.

Foxhunter went to one end of the clearing. Her gaze was calm and she curled her tail around her paws. Oakpaw suddenly lunged forward, landing on top of Foxhunter. Foxhunter gave a massive heave and flung him off. Oakpaw didn't have time to recover as he crashed to the floor. Foxhunter sprung on him, quick as a flash.

Oakpaw was ready though and met her stomach with his legs. He gave a massive push up, flinging her back. Foxhunter was able to

land on her feet though. She ran around him suddenly and struck the soft part of his hind legs, causing him to stumble. Oakpaw fell to the side, kicking up dust.

The red furred she-cat was looking content as she made her way to the side of the clearing. Redsong shook her head, "there is still a lot to learn. I think today we will teach something simple, yet effective. Oakpaw, you could have used this move when Foxhunter leapt on top of you."

Redsong looked up at Chestnutfur, she motioned for her to come into the clearing. She sat down, "sometimes you cannot simply outpower your opponent. You need to use your cunning. We will show you have you can look like you are defeated without actually being defeated."

Chestnutfur purred, excitement coursed through her muscles. Rainpaw watched with interest as the two she-cats circled each other. Finally Chestnutfur leapt, knocking Redsong over. Redsong was on her back, looking defenseless. She suddenly went limp and Chestnutfur rushed over, leaning on top of her. Redsong used this opportunity to jab Chestnutfur in the belly. She rolled away and shook off sand as she stood up.

Chestnutfur groaned, "could you have been a little softer?"

"Don't be a weakling Chestnutfur! You're the Clan deputy!" Redsong teased. "Now, Pinepaw, I want you to let Rainpaw try it on you."

Pinepaw dipped her head and trotted into the center of the hollow. Her sleek silver pelt was dappled under the sunlight. Rainpaw followed, feeling a little nervous facing a more experienced apprentice.

Pinepaw suddenly lunged without warning, she grappled Rainpaw and pushed her to the ground. Rainpaw went limp and Pinepaw leaned down as if to give a killing bite.

Rainpaw was able to suddenly wiggle forward. She slammed her hind paws into Pinepaw's chin sending her flying on her back. Rainpaw leapt through the air, and just as she was about to land, Pinepaw shot her legs up. Rainpaw went flying and slammed to the ground, getting the wind knocked out of her.

"Enough! That was very good Pinepaw and Rainpaw! Remember in a battle situation, do something unexpected. You could have been a bit faster with the leap Rainpaw." Chestnutfur purred.

Pinepaw was grooming her pelt. She nodded, answering briefly,

"yes Chestnutfur."

Oakpaw yowled, "come on! My turn!"

"Foxhunter, you will be paired with Oakpaw. Pinepaw and Rainpaw continue to work together." Redsong commanded.

After training until the sun was past being high in the sky, Chestnutfur stopped them, "I think it's about time we head back and get some fresh-kill."

Oakpaw nodded, "I'm starving! I could eat a whole hawk!"

"Why would you want to? Hawks are too… weird tasting mouse-brain!" Redsong answered.

Oakpaw looked up at his mentor with wide eyes, "you have eaten a hawk?!"

"I've tasted one. When we had to travel to the mountains one time…" Redsong started going on her story.

Rainpaw had to agree. She could eat a whole hawk about now. The battle training patrol began heading back, but as they did, Chestnutfur halted. A scent traveled to their noses, one of wind and Heather.

'Windclan? This far into the forest? What could they possibly want?' Rainpaw was looking around.

Sunshine suddenly came trotting up from the direction of the Windclan border. Rainpaw realized that, behind him, was a black tom, a curly haired white tom, and a calico she-cat. On either side of them were Doghunter and Spottedwasp. In the back was Honeysky.

'Scorchstar? Sheepfur? Tatteredmist? Why are they here?' Rainpaw eyed them warily.

Chestnutfur frowned, "what is going on Sunshine?"

Sunshine looked nervous, "they wish to speak to Lionstar."

Chestnutfur lashed her tail, "You know that can't happen right now. Go home Scorchstar!"

Scorchstar stared back, "not until I speak with Lionstar."

Chestnutfur lashed her tail and forced her fur to lie flat. Her nostrils flared. This was a tough situation for her. It was send the Windclan cats home and look weak that way, or bring them to the heart of Thunderclan and show how weak Lionstar was.

"Rainpaw, Oakpaw, Pinepaw, please go on ahead and let Lionstar know we have guests!" Chestnutfur tried to act calm.

Oakpaw opened his mouth as if to say something then clamped it shut. He dipped his head and headed into the ferns. Pinepaw was

waiting for Rainpaw to go. She decided to run after Oakpaw. She felt as though there were Windclan eyes hiding behind every tree and bush.

As she burst into camp, she had to gasp for air. All eyes fell on her. Littlefoot came rushing out of the medicine den, "Chestnutfur can't bring them here! Lionstar can't stand up right now, let alone speak with another leader."

Rainpaw frowned, her tail dropped to the earth below her. Bloodpath stared as the entrance rustled, his eyes narrowed. Cloudpaw poked her head out from fixing something on the warriors den with Cedarpelt.

Chestnutfur walked in, followed by Foxhunter and Redsong. After them came the patrol escorting Scorchstar. Several of the Thunderclan warriors hissed in anger.

Bloodpath took a step forward, "why in Starclan's name is HE here?!"

Chestnutfur was about to open her mouth when she heard a voice croak out, "Scorchstar, what brings you to Thunderclan?"

In shock, Rainpaw turned around. Standing at the entrance to the medicine den was Lionstar. His golden mane was in shambles and sticking up all over the place. Cobwebs and herbs were plastered against his throat, but even then pus leaked out of his wound. His legs shook a bit, and a sour smell radiated from his body.

Scorchstar seemed a little surprised by the sight of the Thunderclan leader. Tatteredmist was giving a sneer at the sight of Lionstar in his weakened state. Sheepfur looked almost ashamed, his gaze falling to his paws.

"I have come to give Thunderclan an ultimatum. Windclan is growing in numbers and we need more prey. Thunderclan appears to be shrinking. The land that Bramblestar took back from us all those moons ago, we want it back. We will give you until the day after the next gathering. If we do not see you backing down, this means we will take it by force." Scorchstar ignored the shocked gazes and the rage coming from Thunderclan cats.

Lionstar suddenly glared daggers at the Windclan leader. He managed to steady his legs a little as he rasped, "Leave Scorchstar. We will give you an answer at the next Gathering."

Scorchstar lashed his tail, "Just remember, if you don't give it up, cats will die. You will be killing both Windclan and Thunderclan warriors. The blood of two Clans will lay at your paws."

Chestnutfur walked forward, "Sunshine, Bloodpath, and Cedarpelt, please escort them out."

Bloodpath dug his claws into the earth, "gladly. Come on you crow-food eating pieces of fox dung."

The three Thunderclan warriors surrounded the patrol. Rainpaw saw Tatteredmist give one final look back, one filled with pure hatred, before she disappeared through the thorn tunnel. Rainpaw frowned. How dare they come to the Thunderclan camp and threaten them like this?!

There was a soft plopping noise. When Rainpaw looked over, Lionstar had collapsed onto the ground with his chest heaving. Chestnutfur dashed over, her gaze filled with concern. Alderheart came out, his eyes glistened with sorrow.

"A-hem. Rainpaw?"

Rainpaw jumped at the sudden disturbance. She turned to see Littlefoot, staring at her with wide eyes. He was trembling a little, and making quick glances to Lionstar. Alderheart was looking sorrowfully at the leader as Chestnutfur helped him back into the medicine den.

"Littlefoot, do you need help with something?" Cloudpaw came running up, her tail twitching a bit.

Littlefoot jerked his head for them to follow him. His small tabby pelt was bristling a bit. They sat down on the edge of the clearing.

"Lionstar won't survive without marigold. We have none, and I have combed over every inch of the territory for it. Alderheart doesn't know what to do, and we have tried horsetail." Littlefoot was looking scared, shuffling his paws in the dirt. "At the Gathering, Riverspirit offered to help us, but Alderheart turned her down. He was worried that news of Lionstar's weakness would come out."

Rainpaw felt so guilty. Lionstar was struggling because she couldn't stop Tatteredmist from attacking her. She leaned in, "is there anything we can do?"

Littlefoot pondered for a minute before he nodded, "we need to go to Riverclan…. Riverspirit will still be willing to help us."

Rainpaw looked uncertain. Go to Riverclan? When Alderheart already turned down the offer for help? As she looked up, Rainpaw noticed Cloudpaw already heading towards the camp entrance. Bloodpath narrowed his eyes suspiciously at her as she neared the tunnel.

"Come on slow slugs! We don't have all day to get herbs!"

Cloudpaw called.

Bloodpath seemed to relax at that. He turned his attention back to Cedarpelt. The two appeared to be deep in discussion. Littlefoot came running up, "the faster we go the less suspicious it w-"

"What's suspicious?" Bloodpath had come trotting over, Rainpaw gulped.

Littlefoot purred, "I'm taking Rainpaw and Cloudpaw out on an evening herb hunt! Some only grow b-"

"Cut the mouse-dung tiny and tell me exactly what you are doing. You can't lie to me, I know something is up. Rainpaw looks as though she is about to lose her dinner!" Bloodpath growled.

Cloudpaw stopped what she was doing, she glared at him and whispered urgently but with authority, "Lionstar will go to Starclan if we don't get herbs from Riverspirit in Riverclan. She offered to help but Alderheart said no because he didn't want us to look weak. I'm going, and you can't stop us!"

Bloodpath paused for a moment before he started heading towards the thorn tunnel. Rainpaw was surprised at the brazen nature of her small sister. Her gray and white pelt was still bristling, as she watched Bloodpath. He looked back, "well come on, we don't have all day."

Cloudpaw purred suddenly and dashed after him. Littlefoot seemed surprised. He squeezed through the thorn tunnel and as Rainpaw followed after, she caught the end of Bloodpath's conversation with Littlefoot.

"You won't tell will you?" Littlefoot asked, his voice quavering with concern.

Bloodpath growled, "Pride kills cats. We have to learn when to set it aside in order to save lives. We are warriors, not rogues or loners. Now let's get to Riverclan. I don't suggest we go through Windclan, they want to rip our pelts off at the moment. Let's head down to the lake on the Shadowclan border. Remember to keep within three fox tails of the water." He paused as he added, "besides, I feel like you need a warrior in case anything attacks. A patrol of a medicine cat and apprentices probably won't be able to fend off a fox."

Littlefoot's eyes gleamed with relief and joy. Rainpaw had to admire Bloodpath's determination. He very clearly cared about cats, even if he was a grumpy badger.

The forest was quiet under paw as the cats slunk through the undergrowth. Cloudpaw was flicking her eyes around at every

movement, like something was going to leap out and attack them. Rainpaw felt confidence rise up. She was helping her Clan! Surely Lionstar would be ok now?

Rainpaw suddenly froze. Her pelt felt uncomfortable. It felt like ants were crawling around on it.

They were being watched.

Bloodpath stopped. He narrowed his eyes, looking around suspiciously. A sudden flash of white landed on top of him with a thud. He hissed and was about to lash out when Littlefoot cried, "Snowpaw?! What are you doing out here?!"

Snowpaw leapt off of Bloodpath. He spat at her before quickly grooming his pelt. Snowpaw looked up, mischief gleaming in her blue eyes, "I saw you all sneaking out of camp. What? You think I'm going to let you guys have all the fun without me?"

Rainpaw sighed with relief, "I guess not…"

After Littlefoot explained the situation, Snowpaw purred, "great I'm in! After all, we have to practice for patrols when we are warriors together!"

Bloodpath grumbled something before shaking out his pelt and taking the lead. Cloudpaw followed happily after. Littlefoot put himself in the middle, occasionally scienting the air for signs of herbs. Rainpaw followed him with Snowpaw padding at her side.

The night sky was just starting to peek through the leaves of the branches. Fireflies danced in the air, and the crickets began to chirp. Rainpaw was relishing the coolness of the evening compared to the hot sun of greenleaf. Fragrant grass brushed against all their fur.

The patrol eventually headed down to the lake. The waves lapped lazily against the shore of rounded pebbles. No other creature was in sight, save for a few lone ducks swimming in the center of the lake. The moon hung in the sky, beginning to look more like a half circle. Silverpelt gleamed very brightly above and Rainpaw looked up to her ancestors.

Littlefoot was walking with his head down. Bloodpath crunched along the pebbles. When they crossed into Shadowclan territory, Rainpaw shuddered. This felt so wrong, but she knew it needed to be done to save Lionstar.

After awhile, Rainpaw noticed that her sister, despite glowing under the light of the moon, was walking nearly silently. Rainpaw was impressed with Snowpaw, "how are you doing that?" She

whispered.

Snowpaw perked up her ears, "huh? What do you mean?"

"Walking quietly!" Rainpaw was looking down at her paws.

Snowpaw purred, "Cedarpelt has been teaching me. If I can't use camouflage, I can certainly walk quietly along! I've learned to hunt quietly too!"

Cloudpaw seemed impressed as well, "why can't you do that Bloodpath?"

Bloodpath swished his tail, "shut your mouth, we are in enemy territory."

The group grew quiet again, save for the crunching of crisp pebbles underneath soft paws. The scent of water was swamped over everything. Rainpaw frowned. Her gaze wandered over the pines of Shadowclan. It was more exposed than Thunderclan's oaks and cedars. On top of that, pine needles felt awful underpaw and they ate FROGS! She was more than happy she wasn't a Shadowclan warrior.

Rainpaw shook her head as they crossed the border into Riverclan territory. Littlefoot took the lead, "I've been to the Riverclan camp two times… so I know where it is. Plus it will look better if a medicine cat takes the lead."

Bloodpath nodded in agreement. Rainpaw felt a bit safer as her sister fell back on either side of her. Bloodpath kept next to Littlefoot. He would open his mouth occasionally and shake his head.

Snowpaw suddenly wrinkled her nose, "do you smell that?"

Bloodpath lashed his tail, "I was going to ask you the same thing. It isn't Riverclan, not fishy enough."

Cloudpaw seemed to shrink a bit, "is it a fox?!"

Bloodpath rolled his eyes, "You know what a fox smells like, Cloudpaw, use your head."

"Rogues?" Rainpaw suggested.

"Could be, but the scent ends here…" Bloodpath sighed, "I think we are all too jumpy for our own good. Probably just a passing loner, nothing to worry about."

Littlefoot shook his head, "we should still warn Pikestar, especially because we are asking for help from Riverspirit-"

"Ask for help from Riverspirit?" A new voice joined in.

Standing in front of them was a small grey she-cat with black paws, and a black tipped tail. Her blue eyes raked over them,

analyzing their every move. Cloudpaw ducked behind Bloodpath with a squeak of fear. Rainpaw held the cats gaze steadily, "Icesheet?"

Icesheet dipped her head, "Judging by the way that Littlefoot is staring at me, I assume this isn't a battle patrol. Are you here for Riverspirit?"

Littlefoot nodded, "we really need her help. A cat we have is very ill and I need marigold, but there is no more in our territory."

Icesheet looked thoughtful, "It's Lionstar isn't it? Come in… I'll warn Pikestar."

Turning around, she suddenly splashed into a stream of some sort. Light from the moon revealed creatures swimming beneath the ripples. As Rainpaw stepped in, the water wasn't cold, but Cloudpaw let out a gasp of disgust, shaking her paw.

Icesheet let out a "mrrrow" of laughter, "Sorry, I forgot Thunderclan doesn't like getting their paws wet."

Rainpaw was fascinated. The camp was a small island, hidden well by reeds. Water flowed around them, allowing them to grow thick and healthy. As she slipped through, she noticed their dens were made out of materials that were light. She remembered that they floated when it flooded from a Riverclan cat she had met at the Gathering.

"Welcome."

A white tabby with striking black stripes was making his way over to them. It appeared his gaze was heavy with sleep, and his fur was a little ruffled. Pikestar purred, "I hear Lionstar is unwell. Please, speak with Riverspirit, I am sure we can help."

Bloodpath was casting mistrustful glances at the Riverclan leader. Snowpaw was looking around with interest. Rainpaw suddenly felt pain go through her tail. She yelped in pain. When she whipped around a small tom kit was standing and looking at her fiercely, "INVADERS!!" He squealed.

A pretty queen with a pinkish orange and white pelt, stuck her head out. Her eyes widened, before she realized the kit was making a big deal over nothing.

Pikestars throat rumbled with a purr, "not invaders, they are guests. It would do you well not to make enemies, Whitekit."

Whitekit huffed and turned away, "if I'm going to be the best fighter in Riverclan, I have to chase away all the intruders!"

Another pinkish orange kit with a pink nose ran over, she swiped

at the white and pink tom, "Your leader said they were guests. You have a fish-brain!"

"What was that?" Whitekit growled.

"Fish-brain!"

The kits suddenly bowled each other over and we're wrestling in the middle of camp. The queen, Gillwhisker, sighed and ran forward. She scolded them, "can't you guys be more like your sister? Salmonkit and Whitekit, come with me at once!"

The kits groaned as their mother herded them back, "I apologize. I have not seen you before, what is your name?"

"I am Rainpaw." Rainpaw dipped her head as she spoke formally.

"I'm sorry for my kits, Rainpaw, they have more energy than a fox in a fit…." Gillwhisker shook her head.

Rainpaw purred, "it's ok! I'm glad to know they are protective."

Gillwhisker looked relieved as the kits disappeared into the nursery. Rainpaw turned back to see cats peeking out. Two Riverclan warriors were speaking with Snowpaw. Rainpaw was surprised to see her sister getting along with them.

Cloudpaw and Bloodpath were speaking with Pikestar and Icesheet. Rainpaw assumed it was about the scents that had carried in on the wind to their territory.

But none of them expected what happened when the yowls erupted around camp.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

The quiet island clearing exploded into chaos. Cats with an unknown scent streamed in suddenly. Snowpaw felt her fur bush up to twice her size.

Pikestar yowled, "What is the meaning of this?!" Before he disappeared under the bodies of two large and white cats.

"They're going towards the nursery!" Icesheet yowled before disappearing into the chaos of the night.

Warriors, confused and dazed rushed out of their dens. A huge white cat suddenly loomed in front of Snowpaw, blocking her view. The cat raised a paw to attack, but Snowpaw saw this opportunity and ducked out of the way.

'We have to fight! We have no choice!' Snowpaw took her chance to slam into the belly of her attacker, knocking the wind out of her.

The huge cat gasped and reared up, smashing her paws down, hard, on Snowpaw. Snowpaw let out a yelp of pain. The large white cat had her pinned, and her muzzle was so close to her face she could smell the somewhat fragrant scent of her breath. She felt the cat going in to bite her neck, only to have the weight disappear.

Marshfire had heaved the white cat off and grabbed onto her scruff. He slammed her down hard, taking his massive paws against her white fur. Blood blistered on the skin, turning the white a deep shade of scarlet.

Once he let the cat up, she suddenly fled into the reeds and out of camp. Marshfire trotted over, "are you alright Snowpaw?"

Snowpaw shook out her pelt. It stung a little from some scratches but other than that she was fine.

A cry came from a den further in the back of the clearing. Snowpaw dashed over without any questions.

Inside an elder with three legs was holding her own against a white cat. For the first time, Snowpaw noticed a feather of some sort stuck oddly in the cats ear. Snowpaw didn't hesitate and leapt high enough to clear the cat and land on her back. She dug her claws into her shoulders and used her back legs to violently rip the

fur and skin. The cat yowled in agony before attempting to roll over.

Snowpaw leapt off in time to see Marshfire standing beside her. Another large white cat entered and the two of them began to drive them off, side by side. Marshfire nipped at the she-cats legs, while Snowpaw looped around and slashed at any part of their bodies she could get ahold of.

Pain sliced through her tail as she was suddenly drug backwards. She felt a tear in her ear and howled in agony.

It was then she saw the large brown body lunge. Marshfire sank his teeth deep into the neck of the white cat. For a moment, there was a sick gurgling noise, then the cat went limp. Snowpaw panted and backed up, realizing their were two bodies in the clearing. Both were large and white she-cats.

Dizziness suddenly overtook her, and she felt Marshfire press close, "Let me take you to the medicine den."

Snowpaw shook her head, "no! I have to check on Rainpaw and Cloudpaw!"

She staggered, and Marshfire just led her out into the clearing. It was quiet now. White bodies lay in the clearing, along with blood and fur being strewn about like ornaments.

A wail suddenly erupted from near the nursery. Snowpaw felt sick as she walked over a white cat. Her gaze fell on the sight of a mud colored tom wrapped protectively around two tiny bodies. The toms eyes were staring at the sky with a blank expression.

"This is… horrible ….." Snowpaw teared up.

A pelt pressed against her other side. Cloudpaw was covered in blood, and scratches were running up and down her side. She was wheezing. Bloodpath was next to her, looking a lot less hurt. He looked down, "ugh… I am going to be tasting rogue blood for moons at this point. Are you ok Snowpaw?"

Snowpaw was quiet. Gillwhisker was shaking and burying her head into the corpse of the tom. A small kit was shaking and peaking her head out of the nursery.

Littlefoot came limping over. He looked around, his gaze stunned. Riverspirit's graceful form appeared next to him. Her gaze was sorrowful, "Pikestar has lost a life. He is recovering in the leader's den. Rainpaw was also hurt, I am treating her, but she won't be able to make the trip home for at least tomorrow."

Threelegs, the Riverclan elder, walked out of the elders den. Her

sister had drug the two white bodies of the cats into the clearing and added them to the pile. She surveyed the area, "Great Starclan. What have these rogues done?"

Pikestar came limping out. His eyes were shaded with sadness. He leapt up onto the rock in the center of the clearing, "Cats of Riverclan. I am unsure what has happened as far as this attack. It was completely unexpected…. We will be in a very long stage of grief. We have lost Whitekit, Featherkit and Mudspring. We were lucky not to have lost as many as they did. I thank the Thunderclan warriors who helped during this ambush. You may stay the night but you must leave in the morning to give us our space." Pikestar bowed his head, "thank you. I will send Rainpaw home with a patrol when she is well enough to walk."

Snowpaw was too stunned to say much. Warriors were placing the small bodies of the kits into the clearing. They lay Mudspring next to them. Threelegs, Memory, and Havenpelt were rubbing sage and mint as well as preparing the others for vigil. Gillwhisker was sitting outside of the nursery, holding Salmonkit with the most blank expression of grief that Snowpaw had ever seen.

Greencloud came bounding over, "Hey, don't worry about Rainpaw! I can take care of her and will bring her back to you when she is ready. You should really get your wounds treated though."

Snowpaw was nudged awake. Her makeshift bed of reeds and moss was not the most comfortable, but she still appreciated Riverclan for helping them.

Something wet plopped down in front of her. Snowpaw opened her eyes and wrinkled her nose. The strong smell of fish came rising up. Below her was a green and pink colored fish. When her eyes looked up, she saw Greencloud. Greencloud purred, "it's almost time for you to go home! I brought you some prey for us to share since it will be a long trek back!"

Snowpaw's belly yowled with hunger, that was the only thing keeping her from saying no at this point. Greencloud settled in and looked at her expectantly. Snowpaw took a hesitant bite, the flavors of salt and water washing over her tongue. Fish had a very strong flavor to it she wasn't quite used to, but it wasn't bad.

"How is it?!" Greencloud purred digging in.

"Errr great…." Snowpaw muttered, taking another bite.

When she looked up again, she was surprised to see Bloodpath helping some warriors to carry out the bodies of the white cats. Marshfire and Pikestar appeared to be deep in conversation at the side of the clearing. Cloudpaw was nowhere to be seen. She assumed that she would be asleep still.

Greencloud swiped her tongue over her jaws. She buried the bones of the prey and jerked her head, "Pikestar wanted to see you after we ate, come on!"

Snowpaw got up and shook out her pelt. She trotted over to the striped Riverclan leader. His tail twitched a bit and he dipped his head, "good morning Snowpaw. Despite the rough night, I hope sleep still found you well."

Pikestar sighed, "unfortunately I am going to have to ask you all to leave so we can recover in peace. As I promised, I will send young Rainpaw home as soon as she is well enough to travel."

Bloodpath had some cobwebs swathed on his side but he appeared to be healthy otherwise, "We have to go. I have to make sure Thunderclan is ok."

His claws made somewhat deep furrows in the ground. His hair was bristling a bit and she could see slight fear shining in his eyes. Cloudpaw came trotting up, her eyes heavy with sleep. Her fur was sticking up all over the place.

Snowpaw nodded, "can we at least say bye to Rainpaw?"

"Make it quick." Bloodpath snapped and settled by the entrance.

Pikestar nodded, "I believe that Riverspirit and Littlefoot are discussing what herbs we can give. You may take the opportunity to say goodbye!"

Cloudpaw yawned, "thank you."

The two sisters trotted over. They slipped inside to see Rainpaw curled up in a nest of feathers and reeds. Her eyes were open but she looked like she was in pain. The pain shining in her depths was hard for them to see. Snowpaw dashed over, "Hey sis, we came to say goodbye until we see you next time!"

Rainpaw looked uncomfortable, "it's not fair. I'm fine to walk…."

"No you are not…" the beautiful silky medicine cat, Riverspirit, came out of the back.

Next to her was Littlefoot. He appeared to be carrying some sort of leaf wrap. Snowpaw could smell the fragrant scent of herbs coming from it. He put it down, "please listen to Riverspirit. She knows

what she is doing after all."

Rainpaw grumbled but settled down into her nest. Snowpaw touched her nose to Rainpaw's head, "goodbye…." Before she slipped back out.

Greencloud, a tom she didn't recognize, and Marshfire came bounding over. She felt the pelt of Cloudpaw brush up against her and sit next to her. Cloudpaw's breath sounded strong and sturdy for once.

"We will be escorting you to the edge of Shadowclan territory! Just in case those rogues come back!" Greencloud purred, "don't worry we can keep you safe."

Snowpaw purred back and walked up to the group. She eyed the strange tom. He stared back, "before you ask my name is Fiercestrike…."

Snowpaw cocked her head, "my name is Snowpaw. I haven't seen you around."

"Probably didn't have time with the fighting for our life and all…." Fiercestrike meowed sarcastically.

Greencloud purred, "Sorry, Fiercestrike is my grumpy littermate! My sister is Purple-eyes and she is over there, helping repair the nursery!"

Snowpaw looked over to the small group of warriors working to repair the damages to the structures around camp. Salmonkit, the only kit left, was tumbling around with a cream apprentice. They looked happy as they threw a moss ball around. The green object sailed through the air and landed at Snowpaw's paws. She flicked it back and the kit chased after it.

Marshfire waved his tail at the cream apprentice and she stopped, spoke to the kit, then came rushing over. "Did you need me Marshfire?"

Marshfire nodded, "we need help accompanying the Thunderclan cats to the border. Are you up for it Milkpaw?"

Milkpaw's eyes gleamed, "a real warrior mission? I'm in! I'll ask Swooppaw to take over moss ball!"

She dashed away. Marshfire looked back at Snowpaw, "that is my apprentice. She reminds me a lot of you. She has a fire in her belly but is sweet enough to understand all cats have a heart."

Snowpaw's pelt grew hot. A Riverclan warrior was complimenting her?! How exciting! Snowpaw would try not to let that get to her head as the patrol gathered around her.

Marshfire led the way out of the reeds and into Riverclan territory. Snowpaw did not look forward to getting her paws wet again as they crossed over the stream leading to the camp. Bloodpath and Cloudpaw walked behind her, talking quietly. Fiercestrike had taken one side of her while Greencloud was on the other. It occured to Snowpaw they were probably being escorted not out of cordiality but because they needed to make sure Thunderclan cats wouldn't hunt on their land.

Littlefoot kept his leaf wrap as high as he could above the ground. There was a very fragrant scent coming from the wrap. Cloudpaw wrinkled her nose, "Is that garlic?"

Littlefoot dipped his head but couldn't speak. Bloodpath looked back, "Riverspirit suggested garlic. I know you roll in wild garlic for rat bites. I think it will be a little stronger than marigold. I've had to roll in garlic for rat bites before."

Littlefoot nodded in approval. Snowpaw looked confused. How did medicine cats remember so many different herbs? She had no clue which herbs went to what.

Luckily, as the patrol padded down to the lakeshore, no Shadowclan patrols came rushing up. Their paws crunched delicately over pebbles. A fine misty rain began to dribble down, casting a sorrowful mood over the clan territories. The clouds hung heavy in the summer air.

Marshfire dipped his head, "I will take Milkpaw, but Greencloud and Fiercestrike, please head home and help rebuild. I will be back by no later than a little past sundown."

Greencloud lashed her tail but turned around, "Come on Fiercestrike. We need to try to get the warriors den repaired before the entire camp is totally soaked. Plus the dens won't be able to float away in one piece if we aren't quick enough."

Fiercestrike nodded and followed Greencloud back towards Riverclan territory, "bye Snowpaw! Hopefully we will see you at the next gathering!"

Soon they were small dots walking along the shore of the lake. Marshfire turned back, "come along. I know Thunderclan hates getting their paws wet."

Marshfire let Bloodpath take the lead. They swerved from the lake towards the trees dotted beside it. Snowpaw felt relief as the cold rain was a bit more eased at the cover of all the green foliage. She felt the ferns and grass fold beneath her paws. Familiar rich prey

scent tickled her nose and made her mouth water. The fish had been less than satisfying and Snowpaw was ready to bite down into a plump mouse.

Marshfire appeared to be looking around with curiosity at all the trees. Milkpaw was following a bit more shakily, obviously tingling with excitement. Marshfire suddenly asked, "what is it like being able to do easily hunt beneath the trees and climb them? Surely it must be harder than fishing."

Snowpaw flicked an ear, "Thunderclan cats have a natural instinct for climbing trees. We also are taught from a young age how to hunt without letting the prey know we are there."

"Maybe you can show me sometime." Marshfire kept looking around.

Snowpaw felt her pelt prickle with excitement. It was quickly deflated when Milkpaw leapt up and squeaked, "I want to learn too! And maybe I can teach you how to fish! Marshfire says I'm one of the best fishing cats in the Clans!"

Snowpaw purred, "maybe sometime."

Bloodpath looked back, "don't get too cozy, you're not hunting on our territory."

Cloudpaw suddenly gave him a shove, "quit being an aggressive furball. These cats are helping us save Lionstar, that's what matters."

Bloodpath hissed and pulled ahead a little bit. He nodded to the thorn tunnel, "we will go in through here. It is the easiest way to get down to the hollow."

Snowpaw took the back with Cloudpaw, while Littlefoot dashed in, squeezing through thorns. Snowpaw followed after. Her ears flattened as her Clanmates suddenly looked at the group with alarm on their face. Cedarpelt dashed forward, "Snowpaw! What is the meaning of this? We sent out a search party and came up empty pawed! We thought for sure Windclan had captured you!"

Snowpaw looked down, ashamed. Cedarpelt looked behind her, "And why in Starclan's name is RIVERCLAN here?"

Littlefoot briefly set down his leaf wrap, "we needed to go to Riverclan. We were out of marigold and it's the only thing keeping Lionstar alive."

Marshfire cut in, "then we were attacked by rogues. Your apprentices did well in battle…."

"Rogues invaded your camp?" A new voice cut in.

Marshfire dipped his head, "greetings Chestnutfur. It is good to

see you. I apologize for the issues we have caused. May we discuss this more privately?"

Chestnutfur looked hesitant but nodded. She walked to the edge of the clearing with Bloodpath, Milkpaw and Marshfire.

Snowpaw watched. Her tail twitched as she strained to hear the conversation. Her eyes were getting foggy and she realized a mist was starting to enshrine the clearing. Since when had it gotten this misty?

She suddenly found herself walking around. The mist was so thick, she couldn't see any of her Clanmates. She tried blinking it away but it still hung heavy in the air.

Snowpaw saw a flash at the edge of her vision. Some sort of animal was running around in the mist. They were so fast it was like a blur. Snowpaw's breathing sped up, as fear began to take over her rational thinking.

"Hello small kit." The voice was a female one.

The fog slowly began to drift away, revealing a shape. Snowpaw squinted her eyes and lashed her tail, "I'm not a kit… who are you?"

"I am Sparrow…." Sparrow curled her tail around her paws.

Snowpaw examined her. Sparrow was a snow white cat with blue eyes. Around her neck was some sort of odd thing, similar to kittypet collars, with feathers hanging off of it. Each of her ears also contained a feather. Snowpaw realized that the feathers had basically fused inside the ear. They stuck out of her ears like a weird tuft on a bird.

"What do you want? Aren't you one of the cats who attacked Riverclan? Get out of Thunderclan territory rogue scum!" Snowpaw was trying to snap at Sparrow, but she found herself compelled to be afraid.

Sparrow didn't move. She didn't even twitch a whisker at the insult thrown at her. "What if the Clans knew you were part of the reason they are going to fail?"

Snowpaw looked confused, she backed up a bit, only to bump into another large white cat behind her. She began to tremble.

"You are the daughter of Sparrow. You have brought us a sign, a sign that it is time for us to return." Several voices spoke in unison, the choir of ghosts made Snowpaw desperately want to run away.

"Long ago we were driven from these lands by the creatures known as badgers. With your survival, and the way your dark fur turned to white, it is a sign. A sign for us to take back what was

ours. You will become Sparrow. A part of the whole of all of Sparrow." As they spoke they got closer.

"SNOWPAW! Are you alright my precious daughter?" Sweetflower was vigorously licking her cheek.

Snowpaw practically jumped out of her fur. She was trembling and Sweetflower pressed against her, "We shouldn't have let Littlefoot bring you on such a dangerous mission! Here, let's get you to the medicine den!"

Snowpaw's paws felt heavy as stone as she walked across the clearing guided by her mother. But was that her real mother? Surely…. It had to be?

But what…. If just maybe, she wasn't?

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

It was getting closer and closer to the Gathering. Cloudpaw was feeling the tension in the air as cats hurried around camp.

The battle with Windclan was coming.

She practically leapt into the air as a tom gave her a friendly nudge. She relaxed as she looked into the blood orange eyes of Bloodpath. He looked around, "things are coming together pretty well. Even Lionstar is looking a lot healthier."

Cloudpaw murmured agreement. Her gaze fell on her sister who was helping to bolster the sides of the nursery. Spottedwasp had moved in recently, expecting Sunshine's kits. Her spotted belly was rounded, showing she was due any time.

"Ours would be perfect you know…" Bloodpath pressed his muzzle to her ear.

Cloudpaw relaxed and purred. She hadn't honestly been thinking about Spottedwasp. Ever since Rainpaw had come back from Riverclan, she had been even more reserved and quiet. Bloodpath frowned, "what is wrong Cloudpaw?"

"Rainpaw. Something must have happened when she was in Riverclan. Why else would she stop talking to me and Snowpaw? I don't think we made her mad." Cloudpaw murmured, shuffling her paws.

Bloodpath rested his tail on her back, "she did witness something terrible. She watched their deputy die. Unfortunately, she may need some space until she can work out those emotions. I acted the same way when I found out my father died."

Cloudpaw looked up in surprise, "really? Was your father a good cat?"

"He was the best. A hunter, a fighter, and a father! He could have been deputy!" Bloodpath was looking as excited as ever as he spoke about his father.

"What was his name?" Cloudpaw asked, tilting her head in curiosity.

"His name was Bloodstep!" Bloodpath purred, "I was named after

him."
He paused, his gaze looking somber again, "but one day, when I was a kit, he went out on patrol during a harsh Leaf-bare. The patrol managed to find a whole mouse nest! Then they heard a growl and a hungry fox tried to steal their prey!"
Bloodpath slunk low suddenly, "But before the fox could get to it my father leapt in the way. He fought the fox, and eventually slit it's throat. Bloodstep didn't come out victorious, however. He soon succumbed to his wounds."
Bloodpath looked up, "I want to be as strong a warrior as he was. I want him to look from Starclan and be proud of me!"
Cloudpaw pressed against him, "I'm sure he will. You're already an amazing warrior, if I were Bloodstep I would be proud."
Bloodpath seemed to relax, he let out a grumbly and soft purr, "anyway, we should probably go get some battle practice and then hunt. Are you up for it?"
Cloudpaw almost looked offended, "Why wouldn't I be?!"
As Cloudpaw followed Bloodpath into the woods she noticed her steps getting slower. A tang of iron drifted through the air. Cloudpaw found herself wading through a thick substance.
When she looked down, her white pelt was stained red. The sky was no more, and the red stain stretched out everywhere.
Blood.
Cloudpaw was floundering alone in a sea of blood. She let out a wail as her head suddenly slunk under the surface. She felt claws grabbing her and dragging her down. The scent of iron filled her nose and mouth, making her gag.

Blood is going to kill you.
The darkness left behind will linger in the river.
A necessary evil is coming

Cloudpaw let out a wail. She was horrified, and for a moment things went black, before she was suddenly swept away.
Teeth met her scruff suddenly and she was hoisted up. She coughed violently, vomiting water on what she assumed to be pebbles. A tom, the size of an apprentice, was looking at her with wide eyes. Slowly she started to come to.
"H...e...l…"
"What?" Cloudpaw croaked through water logged jaws.

"Hello? Are you alright?" The tom was bending over her, concern flashing in his gaze.

Cloudpaw jerked and coughed violently before sitting up. The tom flattened his ears a bit and backed away.

"You just …. Suddenly appeared in the lake. I swam out and brought you to shore. You're a Thunderclan cat aren't you?" The gray tom asked.

Cloudpaw nodded, "my name is Cloudpaw."

"Oh, you're Rainpaw's littermate. I almost forgot." The tom ducked his head a bit shyly, "my name is Swooppaw. I was actually on my way to Thunderclan…. Is it possible that I could take you home?"

Cloudpaw was too tired to argue. She shakily stood up and Swooppaw dove over, taking her weight on one side. The young tom started walking with her. Step by step the two made their way along the shore.

Swooppaw was quiet, not asking questions as Cloudpaw steered him towards the woods. She recognized the shore closest to Shadowclan territory. Confusion swam through her… how had she ended up in the lake?

A hiss suddenly erupted from the trees. With blood colored eyes ablaze, Bloodpath came dashing out of the woods. Cloudpaw was too shocked to say anything as he barreled over Swooppaw.

After a moment, Cloudpaw croaked, "STOP!"

She could see the tom was bleeding from several scratches. Surprisingly, Swooppaw had not fought back. He was cringing on the pebbles with his eyes squeezed shut.

"He is invading our territory! Great Starclan I thought I had lost you!" Bloodpath looked over Cloudpaw, "you were walking through the woods and a hole suddenly swallowed you up. I heard a splash and you were just, gone."

Cloudpaw croaked, "Swooppaw saved my life. I was drowning in the lake."

Swooppaw stood up, his gaze steady, "I happened to see her on my way to your camp."

"You were on the way to our camp?" Bloodpath hissed.

Swooppaw nodded, his green eyes glistening a bit as he looked at his feet, "I'm not invading. I'm not a Windclan warrior unfortunately…."

Cloudpaw cringed, expecting her mentor to lash out at the tom. She was surprised to see a bit of humor lighting his blood colored

gaze. Bloodpath snorted, "Wow. Riverclan actually has some humor to them, I'm surprised fish breathed cats know anything besides swimming."

Swooppaw seemed relieved rather than upset. Bloodpath flicked his tail, "well come on then fish-breath."

Cloudpaw seemed to give a raspy sigh as she leaned on Bloodpath. He lashed his tail, muttering under his breath. Swooppaw followed quietly, a somewhat sullen look was in his eyes. The grass underpaw was a little louder with the heavy footed Riverclan apprentice in their patrol. Cloudpaw frowned, she wheezed. What rotten luck!

'Can't I get anything done? Without losing my breath? Or, I don't know, falling in a Starclan cursed hole?' Cloudpaw lashed her white tail, hitting a leaf and knocking it to the ground. 'How did I even manage to fall in a hole? Are there holes scattered throughout Thunderclan? I don't remember falling. I was walking and suddenly there was blood. More blood than I had ever seen in my life.'

Bloodpath glanced at Cloudpaw, "Are you cold? Your fur is fluffing out a bit. Swooppaw, get to her other side."

Even though that's not why she was bristling, she was grateful for the presence of the gray tom on her other side. His fur was soft yet sleek, and he seemed to have a calm and reassuring presence about him. His green eyes fell on everything with curiosity and not a single trace of hostility lingered there.

"Great Starclan! I swear I have seen more cats from other Clans than our own lately! What is he doing here?!" An angry female voice meowed out.

Redsong came out with a group of cats behind her. Sunshine was there, and he waved a tail in greeting. Oakpaw snorted in clear irritation, rolling his eyes at the Riverclan apprentice. Strikehearts fur was bushed up to twice his size. Bloodpath snapped, "keep your fur on mouse-brains. He needed to come to speak with Chestnutfur!"

"She isn't our leader yet you piece of fox-dung!" Redsong shot back at her son in irritation.

"Did...did you really just call me a piece of fox-dung? At least I'm not a small pathetic shrew like you!" Bloodpath looked as if he was going to spring at his mother.

Sunshines calm voice rang out, "is this really necessary? Quit your family bickering and just let them in. What harm can one

apprentice do to a full Clan of warriors?"

As much as both Redsong and Bloodpath wanted to argue they knew that Sunshine was right. The pair of orange eyed cats just looked down grumpily. Cloudpaw noticed for the first time how similar they were. Redsong was just a bit smaller with a more narrow face. Bloodpath was taller and larger with a more rounded muzzle.

Cloudpaw suddenly felt Bloodpath lurch forward as they headed back into camp. She was immediately sauntered into the medicine den. Lionstar raised his head, but didn't speak. His tail twitched a little and through a fever dulled gaze his eyes seemed to glow with a bit of curiosity at Swooppaw. Swooppaw sat by Cloudpaw a bit awkwardly, dipping his head to the leader.

Cloudpaw sunk into the soft nest of mass, bracken and feathers. She let out a series of wheezes. Something plopped down in front of her. She looked up into the friendly gaze of Alderheart, "Juniper and Catmint should have you feeling better soon. You can also thank your sister, there is honey smeared on the catmint for you."

Cloudpaw lapped up the herbs. Chestnutfur shouldered her way into the medicine den, her huge form looming and casting a small shadow across Cloudpaw. She flicked her fluffy tail, "I am sorry to hear what happened to you Cloudpaw. Bloodpath will be taking us to the hole so we can fill that in as soon as possible. As for you, Swooppaw, why are you here? We are grateful that a Riverclan apprentice managed to save Cloudpaw, but isn't it a bit convenient for you to be at the lake?"

Rather than be intimidated by the accusation, Swooppaw met the leader's gaze levelly.

"The reason I came, is because I want to join Thunderclan."

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

It was the third sunrise after the attack by the rogues at the Riverclan camp. Rainpaw was splayed out in a nest, she licked her side and grimaced a bit. The wound she had received from the large white cat was healing nicely, and Riverspirit was happy to say that it wouldn't scar.

'I miss Thunderclan. I miss the trees above me and the wind whistling through them. I miss my sister's, parents, and mentor. I miss feeling useful, but most importantly I miss tasting Thunderclan prey.' Rainpaw brooded in her nest.

She didn't much care for fish. The flavor was too much like mud to her liking. It was far too strong for her to enjoy it. It was also often wet when it was brought to her. Rainpaw, despite her name, did not like getting wet. She had only been obliged to eat the fish because of the kind warrior, Greencloud, dropping it at her paws.

'Riverclan has practically been doting over me. Honestly I'm not worth this much effort.' Rainpaw sighed.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own fish, join beneath the smooth rock for a Clan meeting!" Pikestar's sturdy voice echoed across the clearing.

Intrigued, Rainpaw hared her way to the entrance of the medicine den. The pink wound that had been along her flank hurt a bit when she walked but honestly she was happy to stretch her legs. Pikestar was sitting up on a smooth looking rock. The white parts of his pelt sparkled under the sun. Droplets like tiny stars showed he had obviously been swimming right before this. His gaze was otherwise extremely somber.

"It is with a very heavy heart I must announce the Icesheet has gone missing. She has not been seen since the battle with the

rogues. I believe… They may have taken her. If that is the case, we will be sending out a search party. If we cannot find her then…." Pikestar sighed, "for now, we will have a temporary deputy. Marshfire will be the acting deputy in the absence of Icesheet!"

Pikestar leaped down from the rock. He dropped his gaze and vanished into his den. Riverspirit shook her head, "Icesheet is Pikestar's mate. I feel quite bad for him…"

Rainpaw looked up at Riverspirit, "I would hate if my mate vanished like that. What a cruel fate…."

Riverspirit nodded and looked down at Rainpaw, "Would you perhaps be interested in helping me gather herbs? I can see if you are well enough to travel home based on that."

Rainpaw nodded, "I would love to help. Definitely need to stretch my legs a bit."

As she stood up, wincing at the slight stiffness in her joints, she realized how much better she felt. A quiet tom apprentice suddenly walked over. He was looking a bit shyly at Riverspirit and Rainpaw, "Marshfire sent me over here to go with you guys…. It's dangerous out there right now and you will need help."

His soft gray and white fur was ruffled a bit. Riverspirit purred, "of course you may come, Swooppaw. This is one of the first times I've seen you out of your nest since the battle."

Swooppaw nodded. Rainpaw noted how awkward he seemed. Riverspirit padded out of the den fully, "come along apprentices, we need to gather herbs before moonhigh!"

Swooppaw dipped his head awkwardly and dashed after Riverspirit, followed by Rainpaw.

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Rainpaw had to shake her paws off as she slogged into shallow water. Swooppaw was listening intently to Riverspirit's instructions. Rainpaw leaned down and bit into the stem of mallow, being careful not to take too much into her mouth.

Swooppaw suddenly splashed into the water. Rainpaw jerked up, watching his movements as he swam towards a very small island closer to the shore of the lake. His strides were powerful and Rainpaw found herself impressed by this.

As she turned back to get more mallow, she was startled. Out of all the green stems there was one that stood out. The light of the sun struck Rainpaw's eyes as the white plant caught the light.

A cloud is coming to call upon the birds. One white pelt will turn against the Clans

Blood will start the fire.

But a whisper of a quiet rain will wash away the pain and bring peace

When the voices stopped ringing in her head, Rainpaw was left with a splitting headache. She stumbled back into the water. Floundering for a bit. Teeth met her scruff and she was surprised to see the soaking wet pelt of Swooppaw. His eyes were wide and he appeared to be staring where the fern was.

'Did he see it too? Maybe I'm not crazy. This couldn't possibly be a message from Starclan could it?' Rainpaw was shaking.

Swooppaw looked at her, his gray gaze wide, "Wait. Did you see it too Rainpaw? Did you hear cats talking to you?"

Rainpaw looked at him, "so I'm not crazy, but I don't understand. Why us? I'm not a medicine cat! Or a leader!"

Swooppaw nodded, "neither am I. We should tell Riverspirit about this."

When they turned around, Riverspirit was standing there. Her eyes looked far away and her tail was curled around her paws. After a moment she looked up, "Please. We must speak of this to no other cat until I figure out what is going on."

With that, she picked up her herbs and started heading back. Swooppaw looked apologetic as he dashed and picked up his sprigs.

Rainpaw winced as she hurried to catch up to the spooked medicine cat.

Swooppaw fell back a bit as she started to slow down. He looked away, "The message must have really spooked Riverspirit. She usually doesn't leave a patient. She honestly probably forgot."

Rainpaw shook her head, "honestly, it's fine. I am not too worried about it."

As the two entered camp, Greencloud came bounding up, "you're well enough to go home!" She purred, "I'm going to escort you!"

Swooppaw dipped his head, "I'll see you around Rainpaw."

He picked up the remainder of the herbs and headed off to the medicine den. Rainpaw looked surprised, "They want me to leave already? Shouldn't my wound be checked first?"

Greencloud blinked her green eyes in confusion, "sorry, it's just what Pikestar told me to do."

Rainpaw nodded. She suddenly felt prickles go up and down her pelt. Could the message have spooked Riverspirit so much she didn't trust Rainpaw not to talk?

She was anything but a gossiper. Rainpaw hated rumors. She had been the one to squash the rumor going around that Snowpaw wasn't her sister. Rumors were about as trustworthy as a fox.

Another cat came bounding up. His long cream and brown fur streamed behind him as he ran. He was unusual for a Riverclan cat, they usually didn't have such long hair. Long hair didn't allow water to slide off as easily. He reminded Rainpaw a lot of Riverspirit.

"Hello Lionfish, are you and Milkpaw coming with us?" Greencloud purred and walked around the long furred tom.

Lionfish nodded, "though she has already been once, the more experience the better in my opinion."

Rainpaw nodded and fell in beside Milkpaw. The young apprentice

was practically bouncing about. Lionfish shook his head.

"Wait till I tell Swooppaw, he will be SOOOO jealous!" Milkpaw squealed.

Rainpaw deduced that Swooppaw was probably her littermate. That was odd, considering he was so reserved. His sister seemed to be excited and full of energy.

As Milkpaw and the rest of the group started down to the lake, they were met by hisses. Lionfish looked up, putting himself between the apprentices and the hissing cats.

A Windclan patrol.

Rainpaw gulped. 'Why is Windclan so far within the territory?'

The leader of the cats, Tatteredmist, was lashing her tail at the group, "about time we ran into Riverclan scum. Why have you been invading our territory?"

"What are you talking about?" Lionfish was staring at them, seeming confused.

"Why is Riverclan stealing Windclan prey?" Tatteredmist countered.

The tension in the air was almost maddening. Rainpaw found herself shrinking in her pelt. The water lapping against her paws wasn't the only thing making her feel cold. The gazes of the Windclan warriors were strong enough to freeze a rabbit in place.

Greencloud looked defiant, "we haven't cross-"

Before she could finish her sentence, Tatteredmist leapt on her, screeching. The she-cats soon turned into fluffy balls of fury, rolling around on the pebbles. Rainpaw's view was blocked by a black pelt. She felt a claw deal a heavy blow to the side of her head, making her stumble. She was soon sprawled out on the pebbles. A flash of white suddenly slammed into the black pelted cat.

"Icesheet!" Milkpaw yowled with joy.

Icesheet was trembling. It was clear she was a little weaker than when they last saw her. Her eyes burned with blue flames of fury, "GET OFF RIVERCLAN TERRITORY!"

The smaller, black pelted cat quickly staggered away. He turned and raced back up along the shore. Plumdust was wrestling with Lionfish, but she too soon fled.

Without warning, Icesheet hissed, "I've had just about enough of this nonsense from rogues and members of other clans."

The smaller she-cat suddenly leapt forward. With fury still raging in her gaze, her jaws slammed shut on the scruff of Tatteredmist. The calico was being drug by the much smaller, white, she cat, roughly over the pebbles.

Greencloud was catching her breath. Tatteredmist had, had her pinned and, judging by the intake of breaths, had been choking her. Her legs trembled as she stood up. Lionfish rushed over and pressed against her, "Steady yourself…"

Rainpaw suddenly heard a splash. When she whipped her head back to Icesheet and Tatteredmist, she realized the Riverclan deputy was drowning the calico. White bubbles frothed up from the lake, as the she-cat floundered around. All at once the struggling stopped.

"Icesheet! A warrior does not need to kill to win battles! Let her go!" Lionfish cried.

Icesheet seemed to come to her senses, but in that instant, that was a mistake. Tatteredmist gave a massive heave and was able to struggle up and slip away from Icesheet. After taking a gulp of air, the she-cat lunged and sank her fangs deep into the throat of Icesheet.

Rainpaw felt herself let out an enormous cry of fear. Lionfish appeared to be frozen to the spot as their deputy collapsed into a heap upon the pebbly shore. Tatteredmist took off back towards Windclan territory.

Milkpaw let out a wail as Lionfish shook his head and dashed

over. Blood was pouring out of the wound in the deputy's neck. Her eyes were glazed over, no more light shining within their depths. The water frothed into a red pool against the pebbles.

Rainpaw felt a nudge. A voice laden with grief spoke gently to her, "come on, Rainpaw, I promised I would get you home safe."

Rainpaw opened and shut her mouth several times, but numbly began to follow the warrior. Milkpaw was letting out sobs with her head pressed to the dead deputy.

Rainpaw suddenly felt sick. She couldn't take the stench of death or shake watching a cat's life being ripped away from her mind. She raced away suddenly, running for the Thunderclan border.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Rainpaw was quietly cleaning her fluffy pelt outside of the apprentices den. Her blue eyed gaze was still haunted with the memory of Tatteredmist lunging out of the water like some horrible aquatic predator and murdering Icesheet, the Riverclan deputy.

She wrapped her tail around her paws, lost in thought. Just before that, there had been a vision and a message from Starclan:

A cloud is coming to call upon the birds. One white pelt will turn against the Clans
Blood will start the fire.
But a whisper of a quiet rain will wash away the pain

Rainpaw shook her head. The thoughts flying around like gnats inside her skull.

'First off… why would Starclan pick me? I'm just an apprentice and that certainly isn't anything special. Second, why can't Starclan be more clear about these things?'

She heaved a frustrated sigh before her pelt began to rise a little. A familiar yet unwanted scented washed over her nose. Her eyes narrowed as they rested on the gorse tunnel opening. Cloudpaw was stumbling in, along with Bloodpath. Behind them was…

'What in the name of Starclan is Swooppaw doing here?' Rainpaw's eyes widened in recognition as the young gray apprentice helped Cloudpaw into the medicine den. She watched as Bloodpath broke off from the other cats to report to Chestnutfur that they had yet another visitor.

Rainpaw watched her mentor slip into the medicine den. She was startled out of her fur when something brushed her back. She whipped around and Snowpaw was sitting there, looking a little alarmed at the sudden hostility she was receiving. In her mouth appeared to be moss, and she had a question in her eyes.

"Cleaning out the elders den Snowpaw?" Rainpaw asked.

Snowpaw gently set down the moss, "yeah but why is there

another Riverclan cat in camp? Don't tell me they are planning to invade. We already have Windclan bearing down on our borders!"

Rainpaw immediately decided to assure her sister that this tom wasn't a threat, "Swooppaw was really nice to me when we were in Riverclan. He seemed fairly out together, that being said, he must have a very good reason for coming to an enemy camp on his own." Rainpaw have her sister a reassuring look through comforting blue eyes.

Snowpaw snorted, "ah, so you're mooning over a Riverclan tom huh?"

"I'm not mooning over anyone, just pointing out a plain fact…." Rainpaw's fur bristled at her sister's comment.

"Oh keep your fur on! Let me joke around a bit, you've been super quiet lately after all. What's wrong anyway? Why have you been so moody?" Snowpaw asked, swishing her tail along the ground.

Rainpaw immediately felt the urge to pelt away. Rather than run she calmly rose to her paws and dipped her head, "you need to finish the elder's den. This is no time for petty gossip."

Snowpaw's fur fluffed up, and she looked as if she was about to deliver a stinging retort when Chestnutfur suddenly appeared on the Highledge.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Rainpaw took the opportunity to sneak away. She settled beside a heavily pregnant Spottedwasp. Spottedwasp twitched her ears at her, before turning her gaze to the Highledge.

'Good at least some cat knows when to keep out of another cats fur….' Rainpaw thought.

Her attention was suddenly directed to a cat below the Highledge. Swooppaw was standing underneath it, with a very calm look on his face. The only thing that seemed to reveal he was even a little nervous was the slight twitching of his sleek gray and white tail. Chestnutfur looked around, commanding everyone to look her way with a simple gaze, "Cats of Thunderclan, below we have an apprentice. This apprentice has received a sign from our ancestors that he must join Thunderclan. I cannot argue with the will of our ancestors, but still I found it fair to ask for everyone's opinion on the matter."

"No way in the Dark Forest are we letting a Riverclan cat stay in our camp!" Redsong spat, her fur fluffing out to twice her size, "We

have already taken in too many rogues and strays as it is. Are we even Thunderclan at this point? Or Rogueclan?"

The large cat seemed to stiffen a bit at this comment. Her yellow eyes burned with an icy intensity as she looked down on Redsong. Bluesong stood up, dipping his head to Chestnutfur, "I think if Starclan wants him to stay, we shouldn't argue. This has to be for a good reason."

Redsong lashed her tail, "what reason? Starclan cats are dead. They aren't wise just because they are dead. They're just like you and me."

"If we are arguing about the here and now. I have a few things to say." Sunshine stood up and very politely dipped his head. "Before the Clans began...they were just cats. It's as simple as that. We all started off as rogues and strays and loners. We chose to come together to make ourselves stronger and our lives better.

As for examples of living cats. May I remind you that Chestnutfur was a rogue before she joined Thunderclan?"

'Wait. Chestnutfur was a rogue? I never knew that!' Rainpaw's eyes widened.

"Of course there is Firestar. We all know about how great he is and was." Sunshine stated.

Redsong rolled her eyes, "that was different. This is an enemy Clan cat who suddenly wants to join our Clan. He could very well be a spy for Pikestar."

Another hot headed voice chimed in, "Pikestar is a very kind and fair cat. There is no way that he would send a spy over. When we were in their camp, they were nothing but hospitable."

Bloodpath was standing with his tail curled around his paws. His pelt was a bit bushed up and his russet colored fur almost made him look like a squirrel in that state. Rainpaw dipper her head in agreement, "Pikestar wouldn't send a spy and I actually went out with Swooppaw to gather herbs when I was in their Clan. He is a very kind-hearted cat and would be a welcome member of Thunderclan."

Swooppaw stared at Rainpaw with gratitude. He really was a good cat and he had seen the same thing she had in Riverclan. They shared the weight of the prophecy. Could this be why he wanted to join Thunderclan?

'It would make sense if Starclan is sending him messages. Maybe he got himself too involved and this is their way of keeping things

in line.' Rainpaw thought.

Chestnutfur yowled loudly to silence anymore arguments. Her amber gaze raked the crowd, "As acting leader of Thunderclan I have decided that Swooppaw will train under us as a Thunderclan apprentice. If he is able to prove his worth within the next moon, he may stay, otherwise he will have to leave. Does this sound fair?"

The cats of the crowd murmured agreement, even Redsong calmed down. Chestnutfur looked around, her gaze falling on a pretty tortoiseshell queen within the crowd, "Sweetflower, step forward."

Sweetflower seemed a little surprised as she stepped up to the Highledge. Chestnutfur purred, "I have learned that you have yet to train a cat in our ways. After raising a strong litter of kits, I have no doubt in my mind you will be a fine mentor to Swooppaw."

Swooppaw purred and stepped forward, touching his nose with his mentors. Rainpaw reflected her mother was a good match. She seemed to care quite a bit for other cats. On top of that she was one of the clans best hunters.

Swooppaw rushed over to Rainpaw suddenly. He was looking rather jovial and his tail thrashed about with excitement. He purred, "We're going to be training together!"

"I know." Rainpaw purred back as her mother came trotting up.

"Chestnutfur has decided I can take you both out on a border patrol by Skyclan. We have been so focused on Windclan with the upcoming battle, that we haven't really been checking those borders properly. She doesn't think there is much of a threat, it's just a precaution, and a good way to help show Swooppaw the territory."

Swooppaw dipped his head but gave Rainpaw a questioning look. Rainpaw felt her fur prickle a bit, 'Im going to have to explain to him that Windclan haven't exactly been the best recently. I hope he at least has some battle training.'

As Swooppaw and Rainpaw followed Sweetflower out of the thorn tunnel, she looked back at Swooppaw. She stopped and swished her tail against the ferns, taking a seat and wrapping it neatly up. Her ears flicked and she nodded at a place next to her. Swooppaw glanced at Rainpaw but took the hint and sat down. Rainpaw also sat, her fluffy tail curling around her neatly.

"So, you are joining our Clan at a very odd time. I need to ask, do you know any battle moves, Swooppaw?" Sweetflower began with a curious tilt of her head.

Swooppaw nodded, "I know some basic fighting moves and limited Riverclan ones. Though, I am not heavily trained in combat."

"Ok, well, the reason I ask this is because, in just a few sunrises, there will be a battle with Windclan. Lionstar refuses to give the land back that we took from those rabbit-breathed rogues. Therefore, a battle is going to happen. I want to know you are prepared as you will be part of helping to defend the camp. Is that clear?" Sweetflower worded everything, her words dropping harshly like a stone onto the ground.

Rainpaw felt a flash of fear as it really sank in. They were basically going to war with Windclan over just a little bit of territory.

But thinking back, Windclan had broken the code and nearly taken Lionstar's final life. They had murdered the Riverclan deputy, Icesheet, and finally they had threatened them in their own camp. Swooppaw nodded, his gaze narrowed, "Riverclan has had their fair share of problems with Windclan. I'm sure Rainpaw has explained what happened to Icesheet."

Sweetflower nodded, "And I am deeply sorry for your Clan. It's hard to believe they were attacked by rogues just before that, right?"

Rainpaw shuddered. She closed her eyes, deeply scarred by the Riverclan deputy's death. The blood was still flowing over the water in her mind. It filled her mouth, her nose and placed the taste of iron on her tongue. The gurgles of the deputy dying made her feel sick.

A tail rested on her back, bringing her to reality. Sympathetic green eyes were looking at her, two sets of them. Maybe… now was the time to share the prophecy she received with another cat. Maybe she didn't have to bear this burden alone. Rainpaw looked at her mother softly, "Mom. Something happened when I was in Riverclan. Something more than just the death of their deputy and the rogues attacking."

Sweetflower looked concerned, "what is it dear? You know you can share anything with me or your father? No one has to bear their burdens alone."

Rainpaw nodded, "when I was on Riverclan territory, I went to collect herbs and I found a single plant that was out of place of the others. It was white while the rest were green. I heard voices say, "A cloud is coming to call upon the birds. One white pelt will turn against the Clans

Blood will start the fire.
But a whisper of a quiet rain will wash away the pain and bring peace". I know I must sound crazy but-"

Swooppaw shook his head, "She isn't crazy because I saw and heard the same thing. I was also given a prophecy, that's why I felt like I needed to come here."

Rainpaw looked alarmed. Yet another prophecy was coming to light. Sweetflower swished her tail against the ferns, "what prophecy did you receive?"

"A river spins into the thunderstorm, bringing a bird to save the rain."

Rainpaw blinked, she wasn't that dumb, but also wasn't conceited.

'A river spins into the thunderstorm? Bringing a bird to save the rain? Could the river be Riverclan and the storm be Thunderclan? But…. A bird doesn't have anything to do with this.' Rainpaw seemed to just shake her head with confusion, her tail smacked against the ground in frustration.

"Since I was given the prophecy and it has to do with a river spinning into a storm, I figured that meant I turned around and joined Thunderclan. Maybe here I can find answers for the bird…." Swooppaw murmured, looking hopeful.

Sweetflower nodded. She seemed to sigh before she turned to Rainpaw, "so, what do you believe YOUR prophecy means?"

Rainpaw hadn't really had a ton of time to think about it. She shook her head, "The only thing I can figure is that Cloudpaw is involved somehow. But…. The cloud doesn't sound the best. There is a white pelt involved with turning against the Clans. I just can't see Cloudpaw doing that."

"Starclan is never clear with their answers from what I hear." Sweetflower admitted, "We can only trust their prophecies to play out and hope they guide our paws in the right direction. Prophecies aside, let's go ahead and do this border patrol. Maybe it will help everyone clear their heads."

She walked over and nuzzled her daughter. She then rubbed her cheek against Swooppaw in a reassuring way. Rainpaw nodded, feeling the weight of everything pressing down. She decided to trust in her mother and Starclan.

'Things will work out….' Rainpaw thought, 'At least…. I hope.'

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

It was the evening of the Gathering. Tomorrow was to be the fight with Windclan. Snowpaw was dancing on her paws, deciding whether or not to talk to her mother about the vision she had, had. Sweetflower was still out on patrol, though. Sighing, she turned towards the medicine den.

'Cloudpaw will still be in the medicine den with Lionstar tomorrow. As much as I can figure, nearly drowning didn't do anything good for her already weak lungs. Starclan forbid she get into a battle. Still…. I think Snowpaw can hold her own when it comes down to it. Weak lungs, or not.' Snowpaw thought as she pushed her way through the vines leading to the medicine den.

As she poked her muzzle in, an eager, yet raspy voice called out, "Hey Snowpaw!"

Cloudpaw was up and stretching with Littlefoot. The small tabby was stretching eagerly with her sister. Lionstar was, surprisingly, awake. He had managed to get up and was doing weak stretches with them. Snowpaw noticed, while, he did look a lot healthier, fever still shone in his eyes. She could tell each stretch was a massive effort and he was already losing energy. Had the medicine cats not been around, he probably wouldn't have been able to even clean his pelt.

Snowpaw was suddenly grateful for the herbs that Riverclan had provided. While she was lost in that thought, she thought of the strange white cats that had attacked. The cat in her vision…. Must have been the same cats who attacked and their leader was Sparrow.

She was jerked out of her thoughts as the cats in the den started letting out thunderous howls. Cloudpaw looked up, "oh hi Snowpaw! Don't mind the noises, they are just to help us keep our lungs clear."

Snowpaw purred, "well… it's good to see everyone up and about. Keep up the good work."

As the cats continued yowling bloody murder, a familiar face

poked her way in. Sweetflower's green eyes were looking alarmed as she gazed at her daughter. Cloudpaw purred, "Littlefoot, did you and Alderheart not warn anyone about our excercises? Everyone is acting like we have grown a second head!"

Snowpaw shook her head. Her whiskers twitched with amusement. She turned towards Sweetflower. Her tortoiseshell mother was also just, purring away. Snowpaw suddenly asked, "Mom, is there any way we can talk?"

Sweetflower stopped purring, her eyes flashed with concern, "of course my little dormouse. Come on, let's go and find a place to talk."

Sweetflower whisked away from the medicine den. Snowpaw followed her to a quieter corner of the camp. As the sun started sinking low, long shadows were cast all around. The scene was almost ghoulish in a way, and it felt like the spirits of their ancestors were dancing among them in the dim light. Her mother cleared a spot for her and nodded for Snowpaw to join.

Snowpaw sat down, she shuffled around awkwardly before she looked up, deciding to start with a more casual conversation, "so, mom, are you going to the Gathering tonight?"

Sweetflower nodded, "oh yes. You must have missed the announcement. Chestnutfur wants a pretty big group to make an impression on Windclan. Both I and your father are going. You, Rainpaw, and Swooppaw are going along with your mentors. Cedarpelt is coming, of course, as acting deputy. Sunshine is coming, along with Strikeheart, Foxhunter, Doghunter, Stonewall, Oakpaw, Redsong, and Pinepaw."

Snowpaw seemed satisfied. She was happy that she was going to the Gathering. She half wondered if Marshfire and Greenpaw would be there. Shaking her head, she continued, "Mom… I can talk to you about anything, right?"

"Of course my little dormouse. Is something ruffling your fur?" Sweetflower rested her tail on her daughter's back.

"Well. I'll be blunt…. Am I really your kit?" Snowpaw asked.

Sweetflower seemed to freeze. The fur on her shoulders rose up, and she looked down. Was that shame glittering in her eyes? Sweetflower heaved a heavy sigh, before she continued, "you will always be my kit, Snowpaw, but if you are asking something else then, technically, no. We took you in when you didn't even have your eyes open. You were left out in the cold, to die."

Snowpaw flinched. The gears were turning in her mind as she processed this information. She didn't look too different from her sister's, but the vision she had basically confirmed her suspicions. It made sense why Redsong had glared at her during the meeting when Swooppaw joined Thunderclan.

Snowpaw wasn't a Thunderclan cat.

Sweetflower immediately began trying to defend everything, "but you have always been Thunderclan to us. We didn't raise you any differently because you are just as important as any other cat. Thunderclan isn't determined by blood, it is determined by spirit. A warrior is the same. Your spirit turns you into who you are, not where you came from."

Snowpaw was just quiet. She looked back up, "then….who is my real mother? My real father? Am I even a Clan cat at all?"

Sweetflower looked away, "I would tell you if I could, Snowpaw, but we don't know the answer to that question. You were found on the Gathering island. Your… littermates had been torn apart by some other predator. We figured it was a fox since the lake had been frozen over enough at the time that a fox could walk across it. You were only found because the snow hid you enough to keep you safe. We think the predator may have left as soon as the gathering began and that's why you managed to survive the cold."

Snowpaw was quiet. She started backing away from her mother. Not just her but all of Thunderclan had lied about where she came from. She whipped around and ran away, nearly barrelling over Oakpaw in the process. Oakpaw hissed, "watch it Kittypet!"

Snowpaw's eyes glittered with rage and grief. She ran into the apprentices den and curled up with her tail over her face. She wasn't a Thunderclan cat. She could be a kittypet for all she knew. A quiet voice made itself known by clearing its throat. Snowpaw slowly raised her head, half expecting Sweetflower to have followed her, only to find Pinepaw staring at her with a concerned and soft gaze. "Do you want to talk about it?" She asked softly.

Snowpaw considered sulking there with her eyes firmly shut, instead she flicked an ear. She slowly rose up and looked at Pinepaw, her ears still flat. Her tail swished against the moss as she spoke, "No one told me, I wasn't a Clan cat."

Pinepaw blinked at her, a calmness radiating from the older she-cat. She curled her tail around her paws, "what makes you say that?"

"Because, Sweetflower isn't my real mother, which means Bluesong isn't my real father...which means I may not even be Thunderclan at all." Snowpaw hissed, looking bitterly at her paws.

Pinepaw seemed to consider everything she was saying. After thinking, she tilted her head, "What was your first memory?"

'Does this cat have fluff for brains?!' Snowpaw seemed bewildered by the comment.

"When you first opened your eyes, what memory do you have? Who was lying in the moss next to you? Who cared for you and gave you milk?"

"Sweetflower…. Was the first memory I had…." Snowpaw slowly sat up, "I remember exploring the camp and seeing how cool it was. I remember being excited because I was going to be a Thunderclan warrior."

When her voice trailed off, Pinepaw gave her a knowing look. Snowpaw suddenly seemed to understand, she closed her mouth, remembering what her mother had told her,

"Thunderclan isn't determined by blood, it's determined by spirit."

Snowpaw seemed to relax, "Still… I wish I could find out who my real parents were. I guess it's just odd, feeling like I almost don't even have a right to know that."

Pinepaw purred, "everyone deserves to know that."

Snowpaw was very thankful for Pinepaw. She found it in herself to possibly go and make up with her mother later. As she stood up, she stretched. Pinepaw flicked her over the ear, "we better get out to the clearing. The Gathering patrol is going to head out soon. I certainly don't want to miss this one!"

The smell of Newleaf was crisp in the air as Thunderclan made their way to the Gathering island. Snowpaw half hoped that the moon would be covered, as Windclan was bound to stir up all sorts of problems.

Snowpaw leapt up to the tree bridge. She realized how much easier it was to navigate this time around. The wood underneath gave her no issues as she leapt down on the other side. Looking back, she realized how much she had grown over the past moon. She was slowly approaching the size of a full grown warrior.

Joy flooded through her as Pinepaw landed next to her. She flexed

her claws before padding through the somewhat dense undergrowth that protected the outskirts of the island.

Thunderclan was the first to arrive. Chestnutfur had wanted that so they could choose wherever they wanted to sit for the upcoming storm that Windclan was about to bring. Snowpaw flicked an ear and chose a spot closer to the front, intent on watching the action when it happened.

A familiar smell touched her nose as her mother settled next to her. A little further off were Swooppaw and Rainpaw, chatting underneath the shrubbery on the outskirts of the gathering island.

"Mom… listen, I'm really sorry about how I reacted earlier. You were right…" Snowpaw half glanced at her mom as she spoke, unsure how her mother would respond.

Sweetflower calmly licked a paw and drew it over her ear as she looked over her daughter, "I'm not angry, Snowpaw. It was a normal reaction. That isn't exactly the best news for a cat to hear."

Snowpaw leaned into the tortoiseshell queen. She shut her eyes, "and… I still love you mother."

"I love you too, my little dormouse." Sweetflower nuzzled her affectionately.

Their moment was interrupted by the sound of several paws thundering into the clearing. The moon glistened on the oily pelts of the Riverclan warriors. Snowpaw snapped her head up, intent on seeing if Marshfire or Greencloud were here.

She drooped a bit when she didn't see the green eyed warrior. A familiar brown pelt was stopped in front of her. She breathed in his scent, trying not to get too wrapped up in it. Her blue eyes flicked up to meet his yellow eyes. He dipped his head to her, "Hello Snowpaw. It is good to see Thunderclan here. I see Swooppaw made it safely to your territory."

Snowpaw flinched but the huge tom didn't seem hostile. He seemed to be more curious, "What plans does Starclan have for my former apprentice I wonder?"

Marshfire turned his usually icy gaze to Snowpaw, "I have to go, but I appreciate your time Snowpaw."

"Go where?" Snowpaw's question was answered as the large cat bounded to the foot of the tree.

Then it hit her. Icesheet had died because of Tatteredmist…. Did that mean Marshfire was the new Riverclan deputy? Pride surged through her for her friend. She jumped when a tail landed on her

back. Her mother, Sweetflower, was staring at her with a teasing gaze, "are you mooning over a Riverclan tom?"

Snowpaw wrinkled her nose, "I would never moon over a fish-face!"

"Well good, because I know a tom who has been mooning over you!" Sweetflower purred.

Just as she went to ask, the scent of two more Clans bombarded her senses. The musky pine scent of Shadowclan as the skinny and sneaky cats flowed into the clearing. This was followed by a more forest like smell, Skyclan was here as well.

Where was Windclan?

At least the other two Clans seemed friendly enough. Shadowclan seemed to be acting normal as they spoke to the other cats. Snowpaw noticed a small tom, looking around nervously. A calico she-cat appeared to be walking around the clearing with him. He scooted closer and Snowpaw leapt up. She would greet the new apprentice!

"Hello!" Snowpaw ran up with a friendly greeting.

The small tom practically leapt at least a tail length into the air. He seemed to calm down and sat, "s...sorry. It's my first Gathering."

Snowpaw purred, "I could tell, you looked a little nervous. Is this your mentor?"

"No, this is my mother. Her name is Patchpath." Mottledpaw looked up to his kind looking calico mother.

Patchpath dipped her head, "greetings. It's good to see my son making friends."

There was a rush of wind, signaling the suddenly speedy arrival of Windclan. Snowpaw recognized the pelt of Scorchstar as he made his way up the tree. Chestnutfur narrowed her eyes at him. Scorchstar licked his chest fur a bit and seemed to murmur something that made Chestnutfur hiss.

Mottledpaw looked around, "mother…. I didn't know Windclan had so many white pelted cats."

For the first time, Snowpaw noticed several white pelts glistening under the light of the full moon. They smelled a little different from the moore. Underneath the normal smell of grass and rabbits, there was something more wild. Snowpaw looked at the cat closest to her, a chill running down her spine.

The car had a feather in its ear.

These were the cats who attacked Riverclan!

So why were they here with Windclan?
Snowpaw shrank back a little as one white cat suddenly made her way up the tree. Pikestar bushed up his pelt to twice his size. Violetstar narrowed her eyes and bushed out her tail while Needlestar was openly hostile to this random cat just coming up and sitting by them. Chestnutfur growled, "what is the meaning of this Scorchstar?!"

Scorchstar appeared calm. He looked across the clearing, "Long ago, Onestar tried to do right by Windclan… and put Thunderclan in the place they belong. The land between Windclan and Thunderclan was stolen by the greedy leader, Lionstar!"

Chestnutfur stepped forward, "It was NOT taken, it was given back to us by Crowstar. We needed the land and Windclan was not using it."

Scorchstar spat back, "Crowstar was an absolute fool to give the greediest clan any land back!"

"Crowstar was your kin, Scorchstar!" Chestnutfur shook her head in disbelief.

"And he was foolish. He followed in the footsteps of that damn kittypet leader Firestar and was too kind, but no longer!" Scorchstar was practically purring, "Next to me is a cat who is helping Windclan. This is Sparrow!"

The white she-cat dipped her head in acknowledgement. She was adorned with several feathers around her neck and a feather in each ear. Snowpaw narrowed her eyes. She was astounded to know that the feather was actually poked and healed into the ear.

Sparrow didn't say anything, just looked around the clearing with a steady gaze. Another cat mad his way to the front, Pikestar. He hissed loudly, looking directly at Scorchstar, "you bring SHAME on the name of Windclan's history. Your cats killed my deputy! You killed my deputy with no reasoning behind it!"

The Riverclan cats in the clearing yowled loudly at Scorchstar. Scorchstar looked up, his eyes narrowed at the large black and white tom. Thunderclan was also ruffled, but they were a bit more quiet than Riverclan. The other two Clans in the clearing just looked uncomfortable. The cats in the clearing were hissing and spitting.

"It was in self defense!" Tatteredmist stepped out of the crowd of cats, "she tried to drown me!"

"Because you were attacking our apprentices!" Milkpaw yowled

above the rest of the crowd.

Mottledpaw lay his ears flat back. He pushed against his mother, fear flashing in his eyes.

"Enough! Look, Starclan is covering the moon! They disapprove of these strange cats you invited!" Alderheart cried out.

A wind suddenly lashed across the clearing. The clouds were moving in faster now, as if in response to Alderheart. Scorchstar hissed as he leapt down, "Chestnutfur, tomorrow at dawn. Regardless of the weather we take back what is ours. Your Clans blood will be on your claws!" With that he dashed off, calling for Windclan to follow.

The strange white cat leapt down, and with a mere lash of her tail, the rest of the group followed. As the first drops of rain fell, the leader halted. Snowpaw felt herself cringing away.

Sparrow's eyes were locked directly with her own.

Something was shining within them. Did this cat know something she didn't?

Sweetflower suddenly nudged her daughter from behind. She glared at the white cat and hissed viciously, daring her to step near her daughter.

The sound of thundering paws echoed and Snowpaw began to panic. She suddenly took off, determined on just getting off the island. The rain whipped into her face, stinging her eyes. She could only see vague cat like shapes leaping up. Snowpaw leapt and felt the wet bark beneath her paws.

It was way too slippery. She felt herself practically skidding along with the panicked crowd all around her. Something slammed into her and she fell, for the second time, towards the lake.

Preparing for the cold water to cover her again, she was surprised when teeth met her scruff. Snowpaw opened her eyes and heard a grunt through the storm that Starclan had sent. When she was finally hauled back up to the tree bridge, a pelt was pressed against her. She could just barely make out the faint smell of fish, and when she blinked her eyes she found herself grateful to see the familiar brown fur.

Marshfire was helping her across the tree-bridge. They were some of the last cats, along with the leader's. Marshfire yowled over the storm, "looks like you owe me two, Thunderclan apprentice!"

As he spoke, a streak of light lit up the night, illuminating the forms as they jumped down onto the shore. The wind was howling

and a loud boom echoed across the land.

Snowpaw looked up, "Th-thank you again Marshfire!"

After lingering on his gaze for a moment, he opened his mouth to yowl something but Snowpaw didn't hear as another boom echoed across the clearing. She ducked her head and eeked out, "sorry…" before she pelted towards the trees.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

The rain had continued to pour through the night. Rainpaw was awoken, what she assumed to be, very early. Swooppaw was standing over her nest, his green eyes seemingly grim.

"The battle is today. They are having us all get up and take strengthening herbs. It's going to be a long one." Swooppaw murmured gently.

There was a grumpy snort from a nest a little further away, "couldn't you have given us a little more time to sleep? Eesh!"

Oakpaw was complaining as he got up and stretched in his best. There was a growl outside, sounding very similar to Redsong. Oakpaw heaved a loud sigh and muttered something about how "he wasn't a damn Riverclan cat" so he "couldn't swim in rain like this."

Pinepaw slowly rose up out of her nest. She began grooming herself, trying to make her silver and gray pelt look as pristine as it usually did.

Snowpaw stood up in the nest next to her sister. She shook out her pelt and water sprayed against Rainpaw. Rainpaw leapt back, "hey! Despite my name, I don't necessarily enjoy the rain that much."

Rainpaw looked up, realizing there was a small leak in the roof just above the nest of Snowpaw and the currently empty nest of Cloudpaw.

Cloudpaw was still in the medicine den. She was doing a lot better and was chosen to stay behind and guard it. Pinepaw finally stood up and walked out without another word. Foxhunter would probably be waiting for her.

Cedarpelt poked his head in, "come on sleepy slugs, Chestnutfur and I both want you to take your herbs. We are lining up at the border soon."

Rainpaw nodded. Swooppaw was practically bouncing around with excitement. Snowpaw rushed out of the den, probably fine with the downpour since she was already wet.

Swooppaw purred, "let's go then!"

As the two walked out into the clearing, Rainpaw noticed how harsh the rain was. Her paws squelched against the ground of the camp. She internally sighed. This wouldn't just be her first battle, this would be a battle in crappy weather.

Chestnutfur stood atop the Highledge, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Rainpaw and Swooppaw were already out, ducking their heads against the steady rain. Snowpaw came and joined them, followed by Cedarpelt. Soon the rest of Thunderclan were out in the clearing, as miserable looking as drowned rats.

"Today we fight, not only to keep Thunderclan safe, but to keep what was rightfully given to us!" Chestnutfur called, "the blood of our leader is on the paws of the Windclan warriors. We will not stand for the unjust actions of the savages known as Windclan! Today, let it be known, that we will fight!"

There was a choir of cheers from the cats in the clearing. Rainpaw's eyes gleamed as she looked up at her mentor. She felt pride for the large she-cat. Chestnutfur gazed down at her, passion burning in the yellow eyes of her mentor.

"There will be two waves of warriors. On the first wave we will have, Sunshine, Honeysky, Sweetflower, Swooppaw, Redsong, Bloodpath, Oakpaw, Rainpaw and I! These cats will be at the head of the battle. You will be on the front lines." Chestnutfur announced, flicking her tail to the warriors she mentioned.

Rainpaw felt a shiver of nervousness pass through her. She would be on the front line, protecting her clan. Inwardly, she vowed that Thunderclan would be safe. She felt a pelt press against her. Swooppaw was giving her a reassuring look. She was grateful for his presence.

"On the second wave we will have Snowpaw, Cedarpelt, Doghunter, Bluesong, Foxhunter and Pinepaw!" She finally stated, "on guard will be Stonewall. Strikeheart and Sparroweye, along with Cloudpaw."

Rainpaw swished her tail. All of them yowled with joy for their Clan. "Thunderclan! Thunderclan!"

Rainpaw felt a tail fall against her back. She was staring into the brilliant blue eyes of her sister. Snowpaw jerked her head, "I think we should go and visit Cloudpaw in the medicine den."

Rainpaw murmured her agreement. Another soft and gray pelted

cat dashed up. Swooppaw was purring, "mind if I join you two?"
"Not at all!" Snowpaw answered earnestly.
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Chestnutfur stood and looked over the moore. Her eyes narrowed as she just saw shapes, peeking out of the shadows overcasting everything.

Rainpaw could hardly tell if any cat was approaching. The rain was so hard right now, she felt like a Riverclan queen. The ground was muddy, and squelched between her paws. Half of her body was already covered in the slick substance by the time they reached the border.

Chestnutfur was at the head of the patrol. Rainpaw assumed that Cedarpelt would be the head of the second. She couldn't help but think of Snowpaw. Her sister was probably more nervous than her. She hoped that them all touching muzzles would bring enough luck to keep them going.

Swooppaw stood next to Rainpaw. Water easily slid off of his sleek gray pelt. Rainpaw was a little envious of the gray furred tom. He was more like a duck than a cat. Not even mud clung to him as heavily as it clung to herself.

Before long, the shapes were close enough that the Clan cats could recognize the scrawny pelts of their enemy. Scorchstar was at the head, his eyes were narrowed against the driving rain, and his teeth were drawn back in a snarl. Next to him, his eyes also narrowed, was Sheepfur. Although, the Windclan deputy looked even more apologetic.

"Well Chestnutfur. Has Lionstar made a decision?" Scorchstar leered at her, his eyes a bit narrowed.

Chestnutfur stood strong. Her pelt was unruffled, except for the heavy rain. Only a very small flick of her tail signaled any kind of disturbance, "That decision was made for us when you tried to murder our leader, and our apprentices."

"Very well, we shall take back what is ours by force! Windclan, attack!" Scorchstar screeched into the damp air.

Rainpaw couldn't make heads or tails of anything for a few moments. There was just a blur of muddy pelts, as the sound of cats smacking into each other echoed through the storm. She was soon brought to attention, however, as pain laced her ear.

"Come on pretty kitty! Why aren't you in the nursery with the

other kits?" A black tom, a little larger than her, sneered.

Rainpaw answered by dashing forward. Sight wouldn't be a good advantage here, so she decided there was no need for tricks. She aimed straight for him, smacking him hard with unsheathed claws in the face. As the Windclan cat went to strike back, something slipped under him and heaved up. The black tom went soaring, and landed with a soft thud on the ground a little further away.

"This is fun!" Swooppaw was staring at her, green eyes bright.

The black tom didn't have time to get to his feet. Rainpaw leapt into the air, landing where the tom was trying to roll away. She grasped his scruff, and used her hind legs to churn sharp claws into his back. The black tom howled in pain and Rainpaw let go, letting the tom run off into the rain.

A screech of agony split the air. Fear went through Rainpaw.

'Sweetflower!' Her mind wailed.

Through the writhing bodies, Rainpaw found her mother. A pure white cat had sunk it's teeth into her hind leg and was holding on. Another Windclan warrior, was on her back. The cat was steadily churning his hind paws and throwing up fur and blood while the white cat bit her legs.

Rainpaw lunged forward. She launched herself at the cat on her mother's back. The wiry Windclan cat hissed as he was knocked off. The dust colored tom hissed and threw himself forward, sliding underneath her legs and knocking her to one side. Mud splashed into her face, and Rainpaw let out a hiss, rolling out of the way just in time. The tom crashed down seconds after.

Rainpaw was able to shakily get up, only to feel pain go down her side as claws scraped against her. She yowled in pain, turning around. The dust colored tom met her head on, and slashed at her nose.

There was a sudden blur of white. Rainpaw feared it was the white cat, coming to finish her off as she possibly did to her mother. Instead the cat leapt on top of the dust colored tom.

"Snowpaw!" Rainpaw cried with joy.

"Looks like I'm just in time too!" Snowpaw snarled and bit into the toms ear.

"They have reinforcements!" Some cat cried as Rainpaw looked up, blinking away blood and mud from her eye.

White cats were streaming into the fight. They landed on Thunderclan warriors with no mercy.

Snowpaw had sent the tom running and came over, "Rainpaw! We need to get you to Alderheart. Your wounds are bad!"

'Are they?' Rainpaw couldn't really feel too much, just some warmth from her torn ear.

As Rainpaw and Snowpaw trekked forward, they were met with a bone chilling sight. Bodies were already littering the clearing. Sunshine was laying there, unmoving. Blood was streaming out of a gash in his throat.

"These cats aren't warriors, they are savages." Rainpaw whispered.

Just as it began to look like Thunderclan was losing, more cats entered the fray. Fear flew through Rainpaw. Did they really call in even more reinforcements? Was Thunderclan doomed?

A cat rushed up to Rainpaw. A fishy stench came off of his pelt. Snowpaw suddenly looked eager, "Marshfire! What are you doing here?"

Marshfire purred a little, "We came to avenge Icesheet. We knew this was happening and that you may have needed help."

Riverclan cats were streaming into the clearing. Their hefty forms were flinging themselves at the white cats and the Windclan warriors. There was a fire driving their paws. A fire to destroy the kit killing cats in front of them. A fire to avenge their beloved deputy.

Marshfire leaned down, he pressed his muzzle briefly against Snowpaw before he dashed into the fray. Rainpaw couldn't help but notice the sparkle in her sisters blue eyes as she watched the tom go. Her tail lashed in irritation. Was Snowpaw really that stupid as to get involved with a tom from another Clan?

Another cat rushed up to them. His green eyes were glittering with concern, "Rainpaw! How did this happen?"

Rainpaw growled, "a mouse-brained Windclan warrior was hurting my mother and I leapt in."

Swooppaw shook his head, "These cats are vicious. The white ones are killing without mercy. They have no sense of the warrior code."

Rainpaw was about to open her mouth when they halted. Snowpaw was suddenly shaking against her violently. As Rainpaw looked up, she suddenly wished she was in some horrible nightmare.

A white queen with feathers around her neck and protruding out of her ears, was standing next to Alderheart. Alderheart was

unmoving on the ground. Even with the rain washing everything away, Rainpaw could still see the blood staining the pelt of this demonic she-cat.

"Great Starclan…. They killed Alderheart!" Swooppaw started to back away.

The white queen was staring at Snowpaw. A smirk slowly began to creep across her face. The cat started towards them, her gaze never leaving Snowpaw. Snowpaw seemed frozen to the spot, unable to bring herself to move away from the horrific sight in front of her.

Rainpaw however, felt anger rise up. How dare they kill a medicine cat? Medicine cats were the kindest cats in the five Clans. They didn't follow the warrior code and treated everyone.

Rainpaw slid out her claws. If Snowpaw was too scared to fight this cat, then Rainpaw would rip her ear to ear. The blood on her pelt would be her own and not the stain of some innocent cat before her. She bunched her muscles and slammed into the white queen at full force.

The white cat, not expecting this, fell backwards and down a small hill. She quickly recovered and let out a shrill hiss before lunging back towards Rainpaw. In mid-air, a flash of gray fur collided with the white queen.

'Swooppaw!' Rainpaw's eyes widened at how vicious her friend had suddenly become.

The white cat hissed and managed to throw him off like a wet leaf. The slick pelted apprentice went flying into some mud that sucked against his fur. He coughed loudly as Rainpaw went in next. The white queen snarled and lunged, slicing the nose of Rainpaw. Rainpaw recoiled with a howl before the queen was suddenly on top of her.

The white cat began mauling her without a second thought. Razor sharp claws bore into her fur. She let out a yowl of pain. Rainpaw was suddenly aware of the world starting to go black.

Just as the paw of the white queen raised up, Swooppaw suddenly lunged in and tackled the cat off. Rainpaw was briefly able to see him forcing her face down into the muddy ground before she lost her grip on the world and fell into the alluring darkness of unconciousness.

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Rainpaw was suddenly standing in a beautiful grassy clearing. Next to her was a river that seemed to be teeming with life. Fish splashed around, while dragonflies flew from cattail to cattail. A frog hopped in the water.

Everything had an odd tint to it. It reminded Rainpaw very much of the way frost glittered on leaves. What was even more odd was the fact that the animals and the scene wasn't quite solid. Everything had a certain transparency to it. The sky above was lit up with what seemed to be an endless cascade of sparkles.

Rainpaw was startled when a voice called, "Welcome, Rainpaw. Do you understand where you are?"

Rainpaw suddenly felt a shudder pass through her. Her eyes widened and horror crept into her voice, "Is this Starclan?"

The small and gray tom in front of her looked at Rainpaw curiously. He couldn't have been any older than a kit. He had the same frost like film around him. Stars danced on his pelt like sunlit water. He nodded, "yes but not quite Starclan. You haven't reached here yet, you have a destiny to fullfill."

Rainpaw shook her head, "please …. You're saying I can possibly go back right?"

"What Badgerfang says is correct, young Rainpaw." Sadness slammed into Rainpaw at the sound of the tom's voice.

In front of her, fainter but healthier than before, was Lionstar.

"Lionstar…. Oh no. I'm so sorry I couldn't save you!" Rainpaw found herself wailing, "If I was stronger I could have stopped Tatteredmist myself!"

"Be still, young Rainpaw. This was meant to happen and far out of even Starclan's paws. This was no fault of your own, but rather fate. I will miss Thunderclan. You were all like my own kits. I always enjoyed watching apprentices grow up. I can still do that and will always be with you." Lionstar stepped forward and placed his muzzle on her head briefly, before backing away.

"There are hard times ahead, Rainpaw. One prophecy has been fulfilled but many still remain. You will struggle if you go back. I must ask you, even through the hardship, do you desire to do so?" Lionstar looked down into her blue eyes.

"Of course I want to go back." Rainpaw meowed, resolutely, "My family is down there. They need me. Thunderclan needs me. I can't abandon my kin and my Clan. Even if I suffer, they will still need me more."

Lionstar gave her a sympathetic look, before he backed away and walked over to Badgerfang. Badgerfang dipped his head and approached Rainpaw, "Long ago, when Brokenstar terrorized the forest, I was one of the kits who were slaughtered in an unfair battle with Windclan. I have come to give you a warning."

He pushed his muzzled against her head, "Beware. The world can be blind when it comes to hatred, and it will be up to you to help the world see clearly again."

Rainpaw cocked her head to the side, "what… do you mean by that, Badgerfang?"

But, by then, things were suddenly spiraling away. The stars above swirled around into a point until they vanished into nothing. The ground below began to crumble away and Rainpaw plunged deep into darkness.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Cloudpaw was nervously churning her claws into the moss in her bed. The medicine den was even more eerily silent than usual. There was the breathing of Lionstar in the back. His breath was ragged and raspy, showing the desperation the tom had to cling to his life.

Cloudpaw was grateful her breath was finally beginning to go back to normal. She looked a bit sadly on. There was a nice pile of green mess in front of her. She sighed at the moss she shredded, feeling a bit guilty. Cloudpaw decided she would go ahead and change the bedding in the dens when the battle was over. For now, she had to guard camp.

Honestly, she saw no point in guarding the camp. Her tail swished a bit as she looked at the heavily pregnant, Spottedwasp, basking outside of the nursery. Her ears would occasionally flick up at the rustle of leaves, as if she was nervous. Littlefoot appeared to be talking to the elderly, Ivypool. She leaned down and lapped up herbs, rolling her eyes at the small, brown, tom in front of her. Strikeheart was pacing around the clearing, while Sparroweye would occasionally glance up at the stone surrounding them, as if he could look right through the trees at the top of the hollow.

Littlefoot approached her. He purred loudly as he scooted past, "Keeping an eye out Cloudpaw?"

Cloudpaw purred, "yes. I haven't seen any Windclan mange-pelts run into our home yet. Dare I say the coast is clear?"

Littlefoot nodded, "I think so.. although there will be a lot of injuries to treat when the cats get back. Would you mind helping me with a few poultices? I would prefer to have some at the ready."

Cloudpaw shook her head, "I don't mind at all."

The two cats padded into the medicine den. Littlefoot stopped to check Lionstar's breathing, "ah, good and steady. His infection appears to be clearing up too. Thank Starclan! I was quite worried for awhile."

Cloudpaw couldn't help but ask the nosy question, "If Starclan heals the wounds of leaders when they come back, why doesn't he just let himself go?"

Littlefoot flashed her a sympathetic glance, "because this is his last life, little one. With all the trouble with Windclan, I'm sure Lionstar is just trying to hold on for the sake of Thunderclan."

Cloudpaw stared at her leader for a long while. She blinked slowly. He was suffering so much for his Clan. Was this what it truly meant to be leader? Struggling with each breath? Suffering for the sake of every cat around you? Cloudpaw couldn't imagine ever doing that. She was happy to be a simple warrior for the Clan. Deputy and leadership were a little too far-fetched for the young apprentice.

Cloudpaw shook her head and quietly followed Littlefoot. Littlefoot set out some large leaves and ferns in front of her. He nodded, "first one we will make is of marigold and horsetail. We will need a lot of that. Alderheart will need all the help he can get when he gets back. Do you know how to chew up the poultice?"

Cloudpaw snorted, "unfortunately I've been here enough for it."

Littlefoot let out a small mumble of amusement before he fetched the little yellow flowered marigold. He then retrieved the horsetail. He set a fair amount in front of Cloudpaw. She leaned down and began chewing up the leaves. Cloudpaw flinched a little, still not used to the bitter and plant-like taste.

She spat it out and, as she went for some more, her ears angled towards the den entrance. There was what sounded like a brief scuffle then an ear splitting screeched filled the air. Cloudpaw

practically leapt out of her fur.

Littlefoot came running out. His eyes were wide with terror, "what… was-"

Before he could finish speaking, a huge calico head made its appearance at the den entrance. Cloudpaw barely had time to react as a large calico she-cat burst into the den. Her pale yellow eyes gleamed with a sense of malice. Her claws were extended.

Tatteredmist!
Cloudpaw didn't let her get far. The young apprentice flung herself at Tatteredmist, spitting with rage. Tatteredmist sneered, "puny apprentice, move out of my way!"

She attempted to fling Cloudpaw off of her. Cloudpaw had hooked her claws into the shoulders of the large calico. She began churning her hind paws as hard as she could on her spine. Tatteredmist let out a screech, she flung Cloudpaw off.

Cloudpaw slid, but managed to hold herself up. She felt the same tight sensation rising in her chest, but that wasn't going to stop her.

What did stop her, was a very hard blow to the forehead. Cloudpaw staggered and fell to the side.

The scene in front of her unfolded in slow motion. Tatteredmist was upon Lionstar, she grasped him in her claws, "do you know why this is happening, Lionstar? Do you remember my mother? Blackfeather? She died because you refused to give us the territory we so desperately needed during the harsh leaf-bare. She starved to death. You let half of our Clan starve. You were not a noble leader, you were a savage tyrant, and now you can join your oh so amazing kin Firestar in Starclan."

Cloudpaw found herself wheezing in desperation as Tatteredmist leaned down and bit into her leader's neck. Weakened from being unable to do much, the neck snapped like a brittle twig, and Lionstar was still.

Tatteredmist purred, "it's over, Blackfeather, you can finally rest in peace."

Tatteredmist then turned and was about to leave when Cloudpaw saw a cat coming up next to her. 'Littlefoot? But why are his paws red? Did she attack him? Littlefoot! You have to run!'

"What do you want you pathetic medicine-" Tatteredmist was cut off, as Littlefoot raked his claws over her eye, spraying blood.

Tatteredmist let out a howl of pain and was about to lunge forward when she stopped. She fell to the side, screeching in pain. Her body began convulsing violently. Littlefoot seemed to have disappeared out of nowhere, leaving Cloudpaw to wheeze on the ground.

"Cloudpaw!" A voice cried.
Cloudpaw raised her head as her mentor, Bloodpath, came charging in. True to his name, his pelt was dripping with blood. He was looking, in horror, at the cat writhing in front of him. Tatteredmist gave one final screech and heaved before she fell still.

Bloodpath looked at Cloudpaw, "what happened?"

Cloudpaw tried to wheeze out,

"She...killed... Lionstar…."

Bloodpath's gaze hardened and he hissed at the unmoving corpse of Tatteredmist. Some bile dripped out of the dead she-cats mouth and her face was contorted into one last howl of pain. Her eyes were fixed at the sky.

Cloudpaw let out a small wheeze, "you...hurt…"

Bloodpath looked down, "this isn't my blood. Well, mostly…."

His eyes glittered with grief before he walked over. He placed his nose on Lionstar and whispered, "thank you for being a good leader and showing us what it means to fight until your last breath."

Bloodpath then turned and muttered something before a wet Littlefoot ran in, "Are you alright?! Cloudpaw! Let me look at your wounds!"

Littlefoot checked over Cloudpaw, before returning with some juniper berries, "your wounds aren't too bad. Take these to ease your breathing. Bloodpath, step into the clearing please. It's still raining hard enough to wash your fur. I can't even tell where you were wounded."

Bloodpath sighed and walked out into the clearing. Littlefoot turned a hard gaze on Cloudpaw, "please, forget what you saw. I was preventing a tragedy from happening."

Cloudpaw just nodded, she was still catching her breath. She shakily rose to her paws. Littlefoot seemed to relax a bit before he grabbed the poultice that she had helped him make earlier, and dashed out into the clearing.

Cloudpaw followed, her eyes glittering with grief. Lionstar had been a very fair and noble leader, it was thanks to him she had become a warrior apprentice. Lionstar had treated everyone like his own kit and would continue to do so from Starclan. She looked up, feeling relief that the rain had finally ended it's cruel and wet grasp on the already dreary morning. Water was still slithering down the rock walls and forming small puddles in areas of the Thunderclan camp. Littlefoot was currently cleaning and plastering cobwebs and herbs to a few wounds that had found their way into Bloodpaths pelt.

Cloudpaw flicked her ears towards the entrance, as the sound of soggy pebbles signaled the return of cats. Chestnutfur was in the lead, she appeared to be carrying a cat on her back. Cloudpaw's heart dropped to her paws. Sunshine was drooping over the side of the leader with a rather evident gash in his throat. There was a wail from the direction of the nursery as Spottedwasp dashed forward, "No, why Starclan?! Not Sunshine!"

Chestnutfur gently placed him down. Spottedwasp buried her

nose into his fur. Small sobs were emanating from her muzzle. Ivypool came limping over, a large gash down her side. She pressed her muzzle against Spottedwasp and pressed against her side. Cloudpaw suddenly remembered that Ivypool was the mother of Spottedwasp. She had retired shortly after giving birth to her last litter of kits.

More cats were slowly filing into camp. Cloudpaw was desperately looking for her mother, father and sisters. Her blue orbs searched each cat. All of them were wet, ruffled, and not one managed to escape without some sort of claw mark or injury. Finally the small form of her father filed into the clearing. On his back, rested another cat. Swooppaw was helping to carry the apprentice into the camp.

'Rainpaw?! Starclan no! Not my sister!' Cloudpaw rushed forward to the best of her ability.

Swooppaw looked up, "She is alive, barely. We had a run in with the leader of the big band of white cats that were at the Gathering. Rainpaw attacked her and was nearly killed, I managed to step in and stop the white cat from killing her."

Cloudpaw let out a hoarse cry of distress. Two wet pelts pressed on either side of her. Sweetflower and Snowpaw were watching as Littlefoot dashed over to treat the injured apprentice.

Surprisingly, Milkpaw walked into the clearing. The young Riverclan apprentice was walking over to Littlefoot hastily with an herb bundle in her jaws.

Snowpaw sighed, "Milkpaw became an apprentice to Riverspirit. She came because she wanted to help with so many injured warriors. Riverclan got away with far less injuries than us."

"Riverclan helped?" Cloudpaw asked with surprise.

"Yes, they were just as angry at Windclan as we were. Pikestar taught Scorchstar a lesson and took away one of his lives." Snowpaw explained.

Sweetflower let out a small gasp of surprise as a body was brought into the clearing. Lionstar was placed on the ground, along with Lilyheart. The elders body was shredded, it didn't look like any cat would have made wounds so severe.

Littlefoot let out a cry suddenly, as another body was placed into the clearing. Alderheart was dead, with a deep gash in his throat. Tatteredmist, Twistedstorm, and Stagpaw were placed in the clearing. Along with Stonewall.

"This wasn't a mere battle over territory…. This was a slaughter." Sweetflower whispered, shaking a bit.

Bluesong walked over and gave his mate a comforting lick, "let's be glad we didn't lose more warriors. And let us be truly thankful to Starclan all three of our daughters are alive."

Cloudpaw was pressed against Snowpaw, both of them looked small and we're trembling. Sweetflower walked over and draped her fluffy tail over them, "Come on my darling dormice. Let's go and check on your sister."

Cloudpaw felt like her paws were moving on there own as she approached Rainpaw. Horror went through her as she realized one eye was totally swathed in cobwebs. There were several other patches of cobwebs all along the small, gray, she-cats body. Littlefoot looked up, "she will not recover sight in one eye. I'm so sorry, there was nothing I could do."

'Oh Rainpaw….' Cloudpaw scooted up against her sister to provide what warmth she could. Sweetflower took the other side and Cloudpaw nearly jumped out of her fur as Bloodpath also came and pressed against her.

Snowpaw was following Bluesong over to get his wounds treated when the call rang over the clearing, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Chestnutfur really didn't have to make an announcement as most of Thunderclan was already out in the clearing. Her gaze looked over every cat there, "Tonight I will travel to the Moonpool to receive my nine lives. Lionstar was a very noble warrior and we will all truly miss him."

Cats in the clearing bowed their heads. Clearly Thunderclan was going to take quite a bit of time to get over the death of their beloved and noble leader.

"That being told, I must appointment a new deputy before I leave. I say these words before the spirits of those we have lost so that they may approve of my choice. Bloodpath will be the new deputy of Thunderclan!" Chestnutfur yowled.

Shock seemed to radiate through the crowd. Not only was he the youngest warrior, but everyone had been expecting Cedarpelt to take the deputy position. Bloodpath stood from his spot next to Cloudpaw and dipped his head, "it would be my honor to serve as Thunderclans deputy, Chestnutfur!"

Some cats turned to look at Cedarpelt after giving Bloodpath disapproving glances. Cedarpelt sighed and rose to his paws, deciding he would be honest with his Clanmates, "I'll be honest with all of you. I am quite happy for Bloodpath. I did not want to position of deputy and a senior warrior would do much better than me in any case."

"But he isn't a senior warrior!" Redsong exclaimed as Little foot fretted over her wounds.

Bloodpath huffed, "While I may not have as much experience as Cedarpelt, I believe that I can become a good deputy."

Cloudpaw looked up at Bloodpath. She looked around the clearing at the uncertain gazes of her fellow Thunderclan warriors. Not a single one was without a wound. She stood up on shaky paws, she kept herself from coughing as she spoke in a firm and hoarse voice, "Bloodpath will make a wonderful deputy. I'm not just saying this because he is my mentor. He fights like a whole patrol of Starclan

warriors, and while he may be hot blooded, his resolve is true. Bloodpath is a true Thunderclan warrior."

Sweetflower stood up, "you have my kin's approval, therefore you have mine."

"So shove a mouse in it, Redsong!" Snowpaw lashed her tail as she snapped out the words.

Chestnutfur was gazing around at her clan. Pride was shining in her golden gaze,

"Bloodpath, I entrust the care of Thunderclan to you. Cedarpelt and Bluesong, I wish for you to accompany us to the Moonpool. For we do not know if those white savages and Windclan have fully been driven off."

Cedarpelt and Bluesong, being a lot healthier looking then the rest of the Clan at the moment, followed Chestnutfur to the path up the sheer rock where they had made their home. Littlefoot dipped his head rather thankfully to Riverspirit. Riverspirit bowed, "Milkpaw can handle the wounds of the Riverclan warriors. I will stay behind to treat the rest of your Clanmates. They are in safe paws, that I assure you."

Littlefoot nodded, "I know. Thank you again, we owe Riverclan so much."
"You owe us nothing, for Thunderclan has saved Riverclan themselves. Two Clans together are stronger than one dysfunctional clan." Riverspirit touched her muzzle to her friends light brown tabby fur.

Littlefoot shut his eyes and took a deep breath, before dashing off after the rest of the patrol. Cloudpaw watched him go, she then turned towards Bloodpath. He had not been seriously injured in the battle and was currently dividing the more able bodied cats into patrols. He then turned, "Pinepaw, Snowpaw, and Cloudpaw. Are you all well enough to go on a hunting patrol?"

Snowpaw nodded and stretched. She had no serious injuries and

was happy to trot across the clearing. Cloudpaw coughed but her chest seemed to be easing up a bit. Her white pelt had some muddy streaks to it, but since she had not actively been in battle, she was not hurt at all.

Plus she wanted to get the images out of her head. The teeth flashing as they chomped down on Lionstar. She shuddered, scrunching her eyes closed before her sister came walking up and draped her tail over her back.

"Looks like we all saw things we didn't want to." Her blue eyes seemed to glow with grief, sympathy, and…

Was that a hint of fear that Cloudpaw was seeing? What did Snowpaw have to be afraid of?

Foxhunter and Doghunter came trotting up, side by side. Foxhunter looked at the two younger apprentices and shook her head, "battles are never easy, but I have never been in one this gruesome. I just hope that Chestnutfur will be able to handle whatever comes next."

Pinepaw walked up to them. She dipped her head, "I heard about Rainpaw. I am sorry she is suffering so badly. My brother was also hurt in the battle, but not quite as much. I hope for Rainpaw to have an easy and speedy recovery."

With that, the ghostly gray apprentice followed her long furred mentor out into the woods.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17

Pain was the first thing that Rainpaw seemed to register. The right side of her face felt like fire ants were gnawing at it, and she let out a low groan, shifting around in her nest.

"Be still, little one. Your wounds are severe." A soft voice and fishy scent filled the den she was currently laying in.

The moss felt very soft underneath her, and it felt like feathers had been tucked very neatly into her nest. When Rainpaw opened her blue eye, blurriness seeped into her vision. Confusion swam through her, because when she blinked, only one eye seemed to register anything. The other was dark. It was pitch black, and when Rainpaw gingerly put a paw to it, she felt the familiar sticky cobweb there.

A gray pelted she-cat, was sitting in front of her. Her amber eyes shone with a wisdom only medicine cats appeared to hold. She flicked one of her black tufted ears and curled her sleek, but fluffy tail around her small paws.

"Riverspirit…?" Rainpaw winced as she spoke, any small motion on her face appeared to cause pain.

"Please do not waste your breath, little one. Something very grave has happened to you. It is something that I cannot fix, but, by the will of Starclan, the pain shall fade away with time." Riverspirit spoke with calm radiating off of her pelt.

"You can't fix?" Rainpaw stared at one for a long moment.

"You have lost an eye, little minnow. You are very lucky that is all you have lost. This battle claimed many lives." Riverspirit sounded remorseful, "it was a wasted battle. Scorchstar has the blood of many good cats oozing from his paws. How he will atone for his unjust actions, I cannot say."

Rainpaw seemed almost frantic for a moment. She tried to stand but pain radiated down her leg. She tried to look and see what was causing it.

"Bite wound, please lay still little minnow. You will merely cause yourself even more harm." Riverspirit looked her over again before

sitting with a small huff.

Rainpaw was shaking, "wh...who all died during the battle?"

Riverspirit blinked, "from your Clan, Stonewall, Lilyheart, Alderheart, and Lionstar. From Windclan Tatteredmist, Twistedstorm, and Stagpaw."

Rainpaw heaved a sigh of relief. None of her family had been taken from her. But…. Lionstar… their great leader had been slain. Rainpaw still wasn't sure how it happened. She wasn't sure how any cat could claim the life of a medicine cat. All they did was heal, they never caused harm to other cats.

'But those white cats were not Clan. They were savages, willing to rip apart the pelts of whoever got in their way.' Rainpaw narrowed her one good eye.

Riverspirit appeared to be mixing a poultice together, "many are wounded. I don't think a single warrior is without some sort of wound. How are you feeling now? Do you need a poppy seed?"

Rainpaw sighed, "no… I think I can handle this. It's just…"

Riverspirit paused and cocked her head. Her eyes sparkled like two jade stones polished to perfection. She curled her sleek and fluffy tail around herself, "go on."

"How will I be a warrior if I am missing an eye?" Rainpaw asked rather hoarsely.

Riverspirit purred suddenly, looking thoughtful, "It is entirely possible. Your Clan and others have had many disabled cats who became intelligent and strong warriors. Crookedstar of my clan broke his jaw as a kit and became one of the greatest leaders in my clan's history. Jayfeather of Thunderclan, became one of the most intelligent medicine cats. Deadfoot of Windclan was deputy before his death, and he had a backwards paw. Brightheart of Thunderclan was savaged by dogs, but still goes down in history as one of the most skilled and cunning warriors of all time. Do you know what they all have in common?"

Rainpaw cocked her head as Riverspirit finished, "they put in the work. They tried their hardest and defied the odds that were given to them, and I think you have it in you to do that. Starclan chose you for a reason."

Rainpaw's eye widened, "you mean?"

"Yes, I saw it that day too, Rainpaw. A prophecy was given to you… and I believe there is more in store for you. You will become a great cat, but you need to do what Snowpaw does, believe in

yourself." Riverspirit picked up the poultice.

There was a rustle at the entrance to the den. A face poked it's head in, "Rainpaw! You're awake!"

Swooppaw, followed by Bluesong, Sweetflower, Snowpaw and Cloudpaw, squeezed in. A flash of irritation went through Riverspirit's eyes, "too many cats. Give the minnow some space!"

Snowpaw was shaking, she crouched over the nest of her sister. She very carefully brushed her cheek against the good side of her face, "I was so worried about you Rainpaw."

"We all were!" Cloudpaw's eyes were as round as two full moons.

Sweetflower wrapped herself around Rainpaw. Her fluffy fur and familiar scent, brought her a sense of calm. It was like she was back in the nursery again. Her mother began to gently groom her, "you fought so bravely. Any warrior would be jealous of you."

Rainpaw leaned into her mother and purred deeply. She felt sleepy, and was in a lot of pain, but she was happy her friends and family were here with her. Not just happy, no, Rainpaw was incredibly lucky. She had not lost a single family member in the course of the battle against Windclan and the rogues.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the High ledge for a clan meeting!" The powerful voice of Chestnutfur rang out as clear as day, snapping Rainpaw out of her thoughts.

Riverspirit looked back, "You may lead her to the entrance of the den so she can watch the meeting."

"Chestnutfur…. I'm glad she is ok…." Rainpaw murmured as her mother nudged her softly to her paws.

"Chestnutstar now Rainpaw!" Snowpaw meowed and kinked her white tail over her back.

In a flash the dream came back to Rainpaw. The healthy, star-filled, pelt of her former leader, standing there.

'It will be difficult. The world can be blind when it comes to hatred, and it will be up to you to help the world see clearly again."

Rainpaw sat at the entrance of the medicine cat den. Chestnutstar stood at the top of the Highledge. A beam of the morning sunlight hit her pelt, making all of the brown hues show up in perfect harmony. Her huge fluffy tail was held high and her yellow eyes beamed with strength. She whisked her tail for silence.

"Cats of Thunderclan, I have been accepted as your leader. I have received my nine lives from Starclan. Windclan has not brought us down with their power hungry ways, no. We shall remain stronger,

I swear on the spirit of Lionstar." Chestnutstar bowed her head for a moment before looking around.

"My first act as leader, is there are three cats who have earned their place among the warriors of our Clan. They have proven they are more than enough to Thunderclan to still be mere apprentices. Thunderclan needs more strong warriors to help them lead." Chestnutstar stared over the clearing.

Rainpaw felt her heart jolt. Three? Was it to be her, Snowpaw, and Cloudpaw?

"Pinepaw please step forward." Chestnutstar purred.

Pinepaw dipped her head. Her ghostly gray shoulder was swathed in cobwebs, but she looked otherwise healthy.

"Pinepaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of the warrior code and protect and serve your Clan even at the cost of your life?" Chestnutstar's gaze burned brightly into the apprentices pelt.

"I do."

"Then by the powers of Starclan, I now give you your warrior name, Pinepaw, from this moment you shall be known as Pinemist. Starclan honors your wisdom and patience and we welcome you as a full warrior of Thunderclan!"

Chestnutstar made her way to the ground and walked over, placing her muzzle on the head of Pinemist before the young cat licked her shoulder.

"Oakpaw, step forward!"

Oakpaw practically bounded forward. He looked very eager and was nearly bouncing around. His claws kneaded the ground before a sharp hiss from Redsong stopped his overexcited movements.

"Oakpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and serve Thunderclan even at the cost of your life?"

"I do."

"Then by the powers of Starclan, I give you your warrior name. Oakpaw, from this moment you shall be known as Oakstrike. Starclan honors your perseverance and skills in battle."

Oakstrike stepped forward and Chestnutstar placed her muzzle on his head before she looked around.

"Some of you may wonder who this last cat is. Although she is a very young cat, she has proved her worth in combat. She defeated a very dangerous cat, and saved even more from being seriously harmed. She was able to save our only medicine cat from being murdered by the blood hungry Windclan warriors." Chestnutstar

looked around.

Rainpaw felt her heart skip a beat. Was it her? Was she going to be made into a warrior?! She hadn't even had an assessment yet.

"Cloudpaw, please step forward."

Chapter 18

Chapter 18

Cloudpaw could feel the gazes of the crowd searing her back like flames. Cats pelts were more than a little ruffled by her coming to the front. Redsong leapt up, "you have bees in your brain Chestnutstar! She can't be a warrior! She isn't ready, and, if I were leader, she never would be ready!"

Chestnutstar puffed out her fur. Cloudpaw looked at her paws. Was she going to have to work even harder for the cats around her to believe that she could, in fact, do this? Frustration welled up inside of her. Her white and gray fur felt like a million fire ants were crawling around inside of it.

"She couldn't even save Lionstar! Lionstar was at least not mouse-brained enough for ideas that make no common sense. Cloudpaw shouldn't be made a warrior yet, and I think you will find several cats agree with me!" Redsong puffed out her fur and let her claws slide out.

Chestnutstar hissed, "are you defying my authority again Redsong?"

"Yes, I am, because there isn't a single cat in this Clan with enough common sense to see she hasn't really earned her place as a warrior yet. Oakstrike passed an assessment before this. He has more than earned his place, but why advance such a poor and weak kittypet!" Redsong was pacing the clearing.

"I am leader and my word is law. I make the decisions and I think Cloudpaw has-"

"Oh, yes. I am forgetting. A rogue is making decisions for our Clan now. Or did the rest of you fo-"

Redsong wasn't able to finish her comment. A flash of tan flur flew through the air and landed on her. Bloodpath was hissing as the two rolled around together.

Chestnutstar hissed, "that is enough!"

Bloodpath was eventually able to pin the senior warrior to the

ground. His blood orange eyes glared into her face. Redsong looked bewildered, "But… you're my kin, Bloodpath."

Chestnutstar looked at Redsong with disgust shining in her eyes, "Redsong, if you do not like the way things are run around here, you are more than welcome to leave, but, just know if you do, you are no longer welcome in Thunderclan."

Cloudpaw felt her heart twitching as she looked at Redsong. Bloodpath huffed and slowly got off of the top of her, sitting down on his haunches. Redsong stood up, her legs trembling. She glared around the clearing, and, without another word, dashed off into the safety of the forest.

Chestnutstar watched the place where Redsong had left. She lashed her tail, "if anyone finds Redsong on our territory. You will chase her off as if she were a common place rogue. She is no longer a warrior of Thunderclan, but… that being said… we have a cat here who is more than worthy of being a warrior. Cloudpaw, from this moment on you shall be known as Cloudheart. Starclan honors your loyalty and bravery in the face of such fierce enemies.

"Pinemist! Oakstrike! Cloudheart!" Thunderclan yowled with Snowpaw, Rainpaw, and Bloodpath yowling the loudest of all.

Cloudheart purred loudly and dashed over to her sister's. Her mother nuzzled Cloudheart hard, Bluesong was practically bouncing with joy and Snowpaw dipped her head respectfully to Cloudheart.

Cloudheart looked between all of them, "I can't believe I'm a warrior! Oh…. But I won't be sleeping in the apprentices den anymore."

She looked a little sad. Rainpaw rasped, "it is fine, soon we will be joining you in the warriors den, and we will still patrol together."

"I'm just so glad you were able to come and see it Rainpaw!" Cloudheart touched her muzzle to her sister's ear.

"Yes… soon all of my kits will be fine warriors!" Bluesong purred loudly.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

The leaves were crisp underpaw as Snowpaw slowly crept her way along the ground. It was like her white pelt made her part of the Earth itself. She was one with the ground and the ground was one with her. She was a silent predator. She did not need a forest colored pelt to help her blend into her surroundings. She just needed her cunning and her wit.

When she was close enough she sailed through the air like a graceful swan. She scooped up the plump vole and knocked it to the ground. Biting deep into it, the spine gave a satisfying snap. Snowpaw looked up, "thank you Starclan for this prey!"

"That is enough Snowpaw. I am satisfied with the prey you have caught. We shall now head back to camp." Cedarpelt stepped out of the prickly bushes to her left.

Snowpaw purred, "I'll need help carrying everything."

Cedarpelt dipped his head and Doghunter emerged from the bushes as well. His long legs made it easier for him to run along the ground. Some cats believed he was even part Windclan. Doghunter leaned down, he picked up the pheasant that Snowpaw had managed to bring down all on her own.

Snowpaw looked satisfied as she rolled her tongue around her lips and picked up the vole. She started running through the forest, feeling energy burst beneath her white pelt. The forest itself was a blur of yellow, red, and orange. Leaf-fall was here, and Thunderclan was fattening up for the cold leaf-bare ahead. Snowpaw burst into camp. She felt her stomach twist with anxiety.

Did she pass? Did she fail? Would she get her warrior name? If she did, she could tell Marshfire!

They had been meeting on the island, in secret, every other night for the last moon. Snowpaw had wondered how they could be mates if they were in different clans. But they lived for the moment. They would worry about other things later.

Snowpaw watched as her sister, Rainpaw, came running into the clearing. One eye was missing, but the other burned a bright shade

of blue flames. Rainpaw was panting, and had been working extra hard to be a warrior.

Snowpaw nearly jumped out of her fur as a ball of fluff landed at her paws. Leopardkit, Spottedwasps kit, was looking up at her with beautiful yellow eyes, "sorry Snowpaw!" She squealed.

Snowpaw purred, "it's fine. What are you up to?"

"I'm playing moss ball with Leafkit! She threw it over here, somewhere…" Leopardkit was looking around.

Rainpaw suddenly sent a tight ball of brown and green sailing through the air towards the brown and yellow kit. Leopardkit leapt up to catch it with her tiny and sharp claws. She let out a tiny meow of joy as she ran back to Leafkit with the mossball in her teeth. Snowpaw and Rainpaw let out little purrs of laughter.

"Snowpaw and Rainpaw!" Cloudheart came dashing out of the medicine den.

Rainpaw blinked her one good eye at Cloudheart, "yes?"

"I have something very important to-"

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!" Chestnutstar had hopped her magnificent form onto the ledge.

Rainpaw looked up eagerly and Snowpaw nudged Cloudheart, "this will have to wait. We are finally getting our warrior names!"

Cloudheart purred, "that's fine!"

"Today is a wonderful day for Thunderclan, as two of our apprentices have passed their final assessments. Rainpaw and Snowpaw, step forward."

Snowpaw practically bounced forward while Rainpaw fucked her head shyly as she shuffled up. Chestnutstar looked down at the two of them with nothing but pride. They had both overcome so much, and were more than deserving of their warrior names.

Chestnutstar looked down, "Rainpaw and Snowpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your Clan even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do!" Snowpaw yowled.

"Yes, I do." Rainpaw spoke a bit more softly.

"Then with the authority given to me as leader from Thunderclan, I now give you your warrior names. Rainpaw, from this moment onward you shall be known as Rainstorm. Starclan honors your courage and your ability to adapt even when things are making your life so much more difficult!" Chestnutstar leaned down and

gave Rainstorm a lick on the shoulder, Rainstorm returned it.

"Snowpaw from this moment on, you shall be known as Snowwhisper. Starclan honors your silence when hunting and your loyalty to your Clanmates." Chestnutstar leaned down and licked Snowwhispers shoulder.

"Tonight these two warriors will sit vigil, and tomorrow, they shall truly be full warriors of Thunderclan!" Chestnutstar yowled.

"Snowwhisper! Rainstorm!" Their Clanmates cheered happily for the two she-cats.

Chestnutstar then paused and let out another loud purr, "I am not finished, for there is one more cat here who has proved his loyalty to Thunderclan. Swooppaw, please step forward!"

Swooppaw looked surprised. His green eyes glimmered like a forest in new leaf. He trotted to the front with his head held high.

"Sweetflower has informed me how well you have been doing in your apprenticeship. You have earned the right to be called a warrior. That being said, Swooppaw, do you promise to protect Thunderclan and follow the warrior code even at the cost of your life?"

The former Riverclan apprentice dipped his head. He held the Amber gaze of Chestnutstar with no sort of hesitation as he meowed clearly, "I do."

"Then by the power given to me as the leader of Thunderclan, I now give you your warrior name. Swooppaw from the moment on you shall be known as Swoopspirit. Starclan honors you following your heart to a new unknown place, but finding out where you truly belong!" Chestnutstar licked his shoulder as Swoopspirit dashed down and into the crowd of warriors.

"Swoopspirit! Swoopspirit!" The cats of Thunderclan yowled.

Snowwhisper purred deeply as Swoopspirit and Rainstorm joined her in the clearing. Cloudheart rushed forward, "I am so happy for you all! You finally are warriors!"

"Yeah… but we still will have to do apprentice duties because there are no apprentices right now." Snowwhisper deflated.

Swoopspirit purred, "oh come on! We are still warriors! That should be motivation enough!"

He lashed his fluffy tail as Rainstorm gave a huge stretch. Rainstorm then turned to Cloudheart, "so, what is the big news sis?"

Cloudheart literally gave a small hop, "well…. I'm expecting kits!"

The three of them stopped dead. They looked surprised. It hadn't

been too long ago that Cloudheart had been an apprentice.

Cloudheart looked a little embarrassed. The silence that hung between her sister's and her friends was deafening. Snowwhisper finally decided to break the silence with a small purr, "I am very happy for you, Cloudheart. Is the father Bloodpath?"

"Who else would it be?" Swoopspirit mused, swishing his rather fluffy tail across the leaf litter of the clearing.

"Does Bloodpath know?" Rainstorm asked rather quietly. "Of course! I told him as soon as I found out!" Cloudheart looked a bit sad. "Are you all not happy for me?"

"Of course I am happy!" Snowwhisper brushed her fur up against her sister's in comfort.

Cloudheart looked relieved at her sister's gesture. She had been really nervous to tell them. She was more than a little aware that she was young. Thinking of the math, she had been expecting kits at the end of her apprenticeship. She did not think that it was too soon for her, especially since that may be the only thing that the Clan thought she was good for.

Meanwhile Rainstorm was a bit apprehensive. She was not sure that her sister's weak body would be able to handle such things. Having kits was not the easy task some cats made it out to be. Maybe watching the birth of Spottedwasp's kits would give her sister an idea of the burden that she was placing upon her body. Her sister was no longer the weak kit that she used to be, but she certainly was not as strong as some of the other warriors within Thunderclan.

'What does the future hold for my dear sister? For the rest of us?' Snowwhisper watched as Swoopspirit awkwardly congratulated her.

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The taste of frost seemed like a heavy burden to the young warriors sitting vigil. They were not allowed to speak, and could merely do nothing but listen to the whispers of the forest as it caressed the leaves at the top of the hollow.

Snowwhisper kept her mouth shut as she turned her bright blue gaze to the stars shining so brightly above her. Was Lionstar watching them from Starclan even now? What about Sunshine?

She shut her blue eyes briefly. Her tail swishing against the leaf litter. When she opened her eyes, a flash of light as brilliant as a sun-high sun, blinded her. Snowwhisper felt her pelt puff up as she

was suddenly thrust into a scene she was not expecting.

There were white pelts stretching out in front of her. They stretched like a frozen ocean over the landscape. Hundreds upon hundreds of the snow colored pelts were marching towards Snowwhisper. At the head of the mass of white, was the same large cat from before. Two feathers hung from her ears, and feathers graced her neck, stretching out like the collar of a vulture.

Snowwhisper puffed her pelt up to three times its size. She was suddenly aware of a presence standing next to her. Rainstorm was bristling, although not quite as much, at the sight in front of her. Swoopspirit was also standing there, bug eyed, staring at the mass of cats.

Suddenly feeling aware that the others were mentally present as well, Snowwhisper looked over. She found herself unable to open her jaws. Her claws slid out as she attempted to dig them into the somewhat softened earth in front of her.

Then, much to the chagrin of her sister and Swoopspirit, Snowwhisper started moving forward. She had no control over her actions or her pawsteps. Each step she took towards the blood-thirsty white pelted phantoms, was forced. It was mechanical in nature.

The fact of the matter was the fact that Snowwhisper looked as though she belonged with these white pelted savages. Her form and her fur was so similar to the large cat in front of them, she may as well have been a mini copy. Rainstorm very obviously was trying to yowl, but she could not. It felt as though tree sap was glueing her jaws together. Swoopspirit tried his very best to break out of the strange enchantment. Panic laced the beautiful depths of the grass green interlaced with the browns in the orbs on his face.

And yet, Snowwhisper advanced, until she was face to face with the cat in front of her.

“Hello Sparrow. You have grown stronger since we have last met. I notice you cannot speak. This is quite an unusual choice for our meeting.”

Snowwhisper merely glared at the large white nuisance in front of her. How many times was she going to be disturbed or tormented by visions of the monster disguised in white fur. She so desperately trying to yowl and spit curses at Sparrow. Sparrow raised a tail and the army of white stretching out behind her halted. Sparrow looked back, “Rainpaw and Swooppaw have not been informed of your

fertile ancestry, have they Sparrow?"

Rainstorm narrowed her eyes. She bushed out her fur to the point she could have either been a small dog or a fox, instead of a cat. Her one good eye narrowed until it was nothing more than a cloudy blue slit on her face. Swoopspirit looked more frightened than anything else, slight curiosity could be detected by the perking of his fluffy gray ears.

Sparrow merely stared with amused eyes. She curled her tail over her paws. These cats had power. An unknown power they were currently displaying to the three newly made warriors. The power to present visions to them, much like their warrior ancestors. The power to corrupt a cats mind and manipulate it like they were nothing more than a piece of prey. In this mindscape, the warriors had no power.Did Starclan have no power to stop these cats either?

Sparrow looked across the three warriors, "Your so-called Clans are tainted by the mixing of blood of impure cats. True cats were descended from the white pelted ones of long ago. We represent the stars in the sky and the snow that falls to the Earth. Our power is unimaginable to you and your ancestors. Our blood is untainted, and we wish to take back our ancient lands from the cats who stole them from us. Your downfall has already begun. It began when you allowed my white coated and pure child to mingle within your Clans.

This cat, she is not one of your kind. She is not a savage warrior. She is a cat that has the blood of the pure racing through her veins. Her heart is made of power unfathomable to you wretched and parasite infested creatures. The cat you see before you is here for one reason, and that is to destroy you.

She is not your sister nor is she your kin or your friend. You do not get the privilege of being graced with such things. You are all nothing more than bugs playing pretend. We will smash you under our paws and she will join us as she helps to rip apart not only the living but the dead as well. War will be waged, and your blood will be on your "sister's" paws." Sparrow practically purred each of the words as Rainstorm's heart filled with more and more dread.

Snowwhisper managed to turn her head around. Her wide blue eyes were filled with desperation. Sweetflower and her had already had this conversation, and, although Snowwhisper did not have the blood of a pure Thunderclan warrior running through her

veins, that simply did not matter. Family was not necessarily determined by blood. The blood of your family was determined by the ones who loved and respected you. Sweetflower would have done anything to convince her kits of such things.

Did Swoopspirit and Rainstorm no longer trust her? She could see the uncertainty burning within the gaze of the green eyed tom. Rainstorm appeared to have no emotions showing in her blue eyes. She often could not tell what her sister was thinking. She was as mysterious as a hole in the ground that they often looked for prey in. All that she really knew was that her sister was very strict when it came to the warrior code. Would that strictness be her downfall?

All at once, the cats seemed to disappear. They were all back in the hollow. Not a single one of them opened their mouths, instead, they all just gazed at each other. A pale pink was beginning to envelope the camp. Bloodpath came trotting out of the warrior's den. He gave his pelt a quick shake before he walked over to the three newly made warriors.

"Your vigil is over. You can go to sleep now if you would like. Your sister and I made new nests for you yesterday. They shouldn't be hard to find. If Oakstrike gives you trouble, just shove him out of the nest. He is a fat annoying oaf." Bloodpath continued to groom his pelt casually.

The very first thing Snowwhisper did was whisper, "I'm sorry." Before she dashed off into the forest.

She wasn't even aware of the time that passed as she crashed through the leaves and ferns that were just beginning to curl due to the leaf-fall air. Frost bit at her soft paw pads as she finally came out onto the lake shore. Her pretty blue eyes gazed up at the dawn sky. Even if everything around her was crashing down, the day always seemed to come. And if Starclan was angry with her, surely they would have punished her by now.

A fishy scent tickled her nose. Snowwhisper couldn't help but wrinkle it in a bit of disgust. The hackles on her back slowly rose and her fur bushed out a bit. She was not in the mood for Riverclan invaders. Every other clan seemed to traipse all over her territory, so why not Riverclan?

Instead she was astounded as Marshfire came stalking down the shore. He appeared to be looking around nervously as he did. His tail lashed from side to side, his bulky form dripped with the wetness of the lake. Finally he seemed to stop, his amber eyes

meeting her own. Snowwhisper stared at him, but she didn't have the gumption in her to be aggressive and her tone, instead, came out as a flat and almost uncaring one, "What are you doing on Thunderclan territory?"

Snowwhisper realized just how exasperated she sounded. It was like a huge weight had come crashing down upon her shoulders. She was too tired to really even bring herself to an aggressive stance anymore. Her sister probably would chase her off of Clan territory soon, and Swoopspirit probably hated her guts at this point in time. Or would they be more like Sweetflower? Would they accept her as she was?

Snowwhisper was startled out of her thoughts when a pelt brushed up against hers. It was damp and smelled very fishy. Marshfire was staring down at her with gentle yellow eyes. His tail lashed briefly, "I was following the scent of an intruder. It seemed to have come all the way to Thunderclan territory. As Riverclan deputy, I wanted to be sure those white pelted cats were truly chased out. Somehow, I was lucky enough to stumble upon another white pelted cat instead. One I actually wanted to see again."

Snowwhisper felt her fur grow hot with embarrassment. He wanted to see her? Why?
"You don't want to see this miserable excuse of a warrior."

Marshfire raised his brows, "And since when did you decide who was and wasn't wanting to see other cats? You are a warrior now? Interesting…" He seemed to pause before he continued, "Why don't you stop moping around and come with me for a bit? I can take you somewhere and help you take your mind off of whatever is troubling you. I will not ask you to tell me, but a walk may be nice."

Snowwhisper bristled a bit, "As if I would go for a walk with some brute of a Riverclan tom!"

But even as she meowed those words she found her paws starting to follow after him. The pebbles and shells crunched lightly against the ground as her soft pads smooshed them. The sand stuck to her pads, but not in a necessarily unpleasant manner. The morning sun was making the lake turn into shades of purple, pink and blue. There were hardly any clouds and the cool leaf-fall air was perfect for a walk. Snowwhisper suddenly didn't mind the fishy scent so much from her companion as they walked. A couple gnats flitted down to the surface of the water, sending small ripples across the

glass-like reflections of the beautiful scenery. It was serene and Snowwhisper felt at peace with herself for once.

The pair of cats were careful to stay close enough to the lake that it would guarantee them safe passage over Clan territory. With any luck they would avoid the dawn patrol from Windclan and Thunderclan alike. Snowwhisper felt her hair crackle a bit as they passed into Windclan territory and up through the horseplace. Snowwhisper flicked her ear, looking around nervously, “Why did we go into Windclan territory? They hate our guts right now. What with the whole ,almost, all Clan war and everything. Did the scent trail lead here?”

Marshfire shook his head, “No. That would be breaking a small portion of the warrior code. Not that it matters, we shredded Windclan. Whatever small dawn patrol they could come up with, I am confident we could defeat them together. This way was just quicker to get to the place I wanted to take you.”

They reached just past the Horseplace with no issues. Snowwhisper couldn’t smell any fresh Windclan or rogue cat scent, save for the few that drifted from the barn on the Horseplace. A few loners lived there, but they were friendly towards the Clans. Snowwhisper half wondered if they were all right in all this, or if Windclan had decided to throw aside all morale and chase the poor cats out of their own home.

Eventually the pair of them reached the Tree Bridge. Marshfire leapt up and stepped forward a little. He appeared to be waiting patiently for her. Snowwhisper hesitantly leapt up beside him, she gave him a rather anamused look, “Isn’t this no cat’s land? And are you just looking for the opportunity to shove me off and into the water so you can play rescue again?”

A deep and rumbling purr erupted from Marshfire, he shook his head, “No. I am pretty sure if I played rescue with you again you would have my pelt. I think I would be returning to Riverclan peltless.”

“I’m not that mean!” Snowwhisper swiped at him on the bridge.

Marshfire feigned slipping and falling into the water below. He looked up, and started swimming strongly to shore. Snowwhisper suddenly realized how balanced she was compared to before. She followed after him and reached the shore a little after he did. When she caught up to him he was shaking out his very wet brown pelt. Snowwhisper reared back, falling onto the pebbles. Marshfire gave

her a rather confused look. Snowwhisper shook her pelt out and sprung back up, she glared at him, “I don’t like getting wet, despite the fact I am hanging out with the kitty equivalent of a trout.”

Marshfire suddenly got close to her. His scent didn’t seem so strong any longer. It was almost sweet in an endearing way. It kept the horrible thoughts out of Snowwhisper’s mind. Marshfire suddenly climbed on top of her and they both ended up rolling around on the shore in heartbeats. He stood up and shook out his pelt, motioning for her to follow him into the water. Snowwhisper purred and splashed after him, “you will help me to swim right?”

“I could never let a cat like you drown,” Marshfire responded as he waded out a little further into the water. “It’s like walking, but with stronger strokes. Pretend you are running through the forest, but move your paws through the water instead. Scoop the water and let it run through your claws.”

Snowwhisper hesitantly followed. She managed to get out to where she could no longer feel the mud and pebbles on the bottom. She did her best to follow Marshfire’s instructions but her head went under.

For a moment she stayed there. She looked up at the surface with sun beginning to poke it’s way underneath and shoot little beams of light along the bottom. A shadow suddenly passed over the light. Snowwhisper quickly resurfaced, “I’m fine, I just was enjoying the view.”

Marshfire let out a purr, “Swimming isn’t so bad, is it?”
“No. Swimming isn’t so bad.” Snowwhisper swam closer to him and touched her muzzle to his.

Marshfire let out a very deep purr, “Unfortunately I have to go back. I organized the patrols before I headed out, but I need to head back to lead one. Perhaps, two sunrises from now, we can come back at night and meet again?”

Snowwhisper’s heart gave a leap of joy, “I will, I promise. I will see you soon then?”
“Yes, soon.” Marshfire whispered as they both parted ways.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Rainstorm was on her way to the medicine den. She had tried not to panic or show any signs of distress as she plodded through the clearing. Her fur was still spiked up a bit. A soft pelt pressed against her side. The familiar form of Swoopspirit was walking beside her now. His gray pelt was also slightly bristled up.

'What are we supposed to tell Littlefoot? Some other cats besides Starclan reached out to us in a vision? Won't he just think we are as crazy as a fox in a fit? And was what they said about Snowwhisper even true?' Rainstorm's one good eye was glazed over as she thought of all of the questions simply piling up.

"Hey. Are you going to be ok, Rainstorm? If what those cats were meowing on about was true, what is going to happen to Snowwhisper?" Swoopspirit murmured, "I mean, she did leave in a pretty big hurry after all. That doesn't exactly paint her in the best light."

"I think when she returns to camp we should talk to her. I do not want to jump to any sudden conclusions and risk my sister's place in the Clan. I think we should also speak with Sweetflower and Bluesong." Rainstorm spoke rather bluntly. "I think giving her the benefit of the doubt would save the Clan a lot of grief, and myself."

Swoopspirit nodded and sighed, "I wish there was more I could do for you Rainstorm."

"Well there isn't. You have done enough. At this point it is a family thing going forward, so you need to stay out of it. Let's just report to Littlefoot and then head back to the warriors den." Rainstorm moved forward so that their pelts were no longer brushing.

Upon entering the medicine den, Spottedwasp was there, lying in

a nest. Leafkit and Leopardkit were nowhere to be seen. Littlefoot appeared to be offering her something in a leaf wrap, which she ultimately rejected. He jumped fairly high into the air as Rainstorm spoke up, “Littlefoot, we have important manners to discuss.”

Littlefoot sighed. He lashed his tail before letting it settle to neatly wrap around his paws, “What can I help you with Rainstorm and Swoopspirit? Are you feeling unwell after the vigil? I recommend you r-”

“Is there anywhere we can speak more privately?” Rainstorm asked.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about Spottedwasp. She is ignoring me right now. I am just trying to give her herbs to help her sleep, since Leafkit and Leopardkit are tumbling around and keeping her awake all night. They have loads of-” Littlefoot paused seeing the look on the two cat’s faces and a shadow of concern passed over his delicate features, “what seems to be the problem?”

Swoopspirit looked up with wide green eyes, “We had a vision.”

“You both had a vision?” Littlefoot dropped his voice a little bit.

“In a sense, yes. We both were in the same vision and so was Snowwhisper.” Rainstorm murmured.

“Really? I have heard of ordinary warriors receiving visions in the past from Starclan, what is it they had to say?” Littlefoot asked eagerly.

“It wasn’t Starclan.” Rainstorm replied.

Littlefoot’s beige tabby fur fluffed up, “Are you receiving visions from the Dark Forest?”

“No!” Rainstorm shook her head, “That is the thing Littlefoot. It was neither. It was not the Dark Forest and it wasn’t Starclan. We were in a vision with the white cats who helped Windclan to attack us. They were claiming that Snowwhisper is not my sister and that she will, eventually, turn against the Clans!”

There was silence before Littlefoot gave her a serious look, “What

I say here, does not leave the medicine den, do I make myself clear?"

Both Swoopspirit and Rainstorm gave nods, while Littlefoot looked up towards the trees above the clearing, "Snowwhisper was found at the Gathering island on a very cold leaf-bare night. There was almost no gathering even held because of the chill. She was found in the bushes beside the Gathering clearing. Bluesong offered to take her and she was nursed and raised alongside Sweetflower's other kits."

Rainstorm's eyes grew wide, "Why didn't anyone tell us about this?"

Littlefoot shook his head and looked down at the ground, "We just wanted her to be raised as normally as possible. We did not expect this truth to come out. We were just going to keep it hidden."

Rainstorm sighed and shook her head, "So, Snowwhisper is a possible danger to the Clans then?"

"No. I do not think she is a danger to the Clans. Snowwhisper has never done anything to harm anyone. We should judge her actions and not her blood. Chestnutstar is our leader and she was a leader born at the Horseplace. Have you ever judged Chestnutstar based on where she had come from?" Littlefoot looked between them seriously.

"Chestnutstar has never had cats come to us in a vision and threaten to destroy Starclan and Thunderclan!" Rainstorm exclaimed.

"I really don't think you should judge her based on the words of another cat…" Littlefoot seemed momentarily lost in thought, "How about this, I will go to the Moonpool and speak with Starclan. Before you act on anything, maybe we should have their judgement. They are the only ones who can truly judge a cat. If other ancestors are threatening the very life that we live, it will be up to them to stop the white cats. That is a territory that we cannot reach while we are alive. We can walk with them very briefly but will never

fully understand until we reach the stars themselves."

Rainstorm took a deep breath and nodded, "That would make me a lot more comfortable, thank you Littlefoot."

She then turned and walked back towards the opening of the den. Littlefoot called out, "And a small word of advice. I wouldn't spread that rumor around the rest of the Clan. Cats talk, and we wouldn't want to destroy anyone based simply off of rumor and the falsehoods of other cats."

Rainstorm didn't reply and kept walking. When she entered the clearing a sweet and soft scent filled her nose. Sweetflower was standing there and purring deeply, "Are you alright little mouse? I noticed that you headed to the medicine den right after the warrior vigil."

Rainstorm looked her directly in the eye, "Why didn't you tell me about Snowwhisper?"

A tail was slapped over her muzzle as soon as she had finished her sentence. Rainstorm ended up gagging on a mouthful of fluff. She glared up. Sweetflower shook her head, "Listen, I think it is about time we had a family meeting. Let me get Bluesong, Snowwhisper, Cloudheart, and Bloodpath."

Rainstorm sighed deeply. Sweetflower jerked her head towards the camp entrance, "meet me outside. This shouldn't take that long."

As if sensing someone was talking about her, Snowwhisper entered the camp. The usual smell of forest seemed to be dampened down by the smell of water. Had she fallen into a creek? Sweetflower was quickly approaching her daughter, and Rainstorm averted eye contact as she slipped past her "sister" and outside the camp entrance.

She sat outside waiting patiently. A leaf landed on her nose and she had to bat it away. A purr rumbled from nearby and her father, Bluesong, came leaping out of the bushes. He was a flash of gray, almost blue hues as he batted at the leaf playfully. A sigh was

followed by this action as Snowwhisper came into the clearing, “Must you always act like a kit?”

“Oh come on, don’t you want to have a little fun with this sack of old bones?” Bluesong teased as he sat down, shaking the leaf litter off of his pelt.

“I don’t want to have fun, but I DO want to know is why in the name of the Dark Forest I was drug into this stupid family meeting when I have a lot of other duties I need to be handling right now!” Bloodpath made his grumpy entrance, followed by Cloudheart.

“Because I am expecting your kits silly,” Cloudheart teased with a slight wheeze in her voice.

Bloodpath rolled his dark orange eyes, “don’t you cats know I am the Clan deputy now? I have a lot of duties I need to handle.”

“But you will always make time for your kits,” Bluesong gave him a father look of “you better”.

Sweetflower puffed as she joined them in the small circle. She shook out her pelt a bit, “So, I am sure you are all wondering why I have brought you here. And by all I mean the grumpy one sitting by my other daughter.”

“Whatever…” Bloodpath grumbled.

“Rainstorm has brought it to my attention that she has found out the truth about Snowwhisper.” Sweetflower gave them all a stern look.

“What about Snowwhisper?” Cloudheart asked, concern showing in her blue eyes.

Snowwhisper puffed up. She almost looked like she was trembling a little as she looked around at the cats that were supposed to be her family. Sweetflower walked over and sat by her daughter, “No, Snowwhisper was not born to me and Bluesong, but she is our kit nonetheless and I will not tolerate her being treated any other way.”

Rainstorm bristled suddenly, “ But mom, you don’t understand. Snowwhisper is a possible danger to all the Clans. Swoopspirit, Snowwhisper and I all had a vision where we met her real mother.”

“Her real mother is standing right here next to her, and I will not stand for you accusing your sister of anything else. Do I make myself clear?” Sweetflower leveled her with a glare, her claws actually sliding out.

Rainstorm was a little surprised. Her mother usually didn't get this aggressive. She had been named for her sweet and calm demeanor. Bluesong sighed and looked between all of them, "what makes you think your sister is a danger, Rainstorm?"

Rainstorm was looking at Snowwhisper. Snowwhisper's ears were down flat, her face was turned down towards the earth and she was refusing to make eye contact with Rainstorm. Her tail didn't twitch and she looked positively miserable.

In all her life, Rainstorm hadn't seen Snowwhisper do a single thing to betray Thunderclan. Snowwhisper had even gone to Riverclan to help and find a cure for Lionstar, despite the consequences of their actions. In the battle with Windclan and the white cats, she had risen up and fought ferociously. Rainstorm took a deep breath, "I suppose you are right. I should also give Snowwhisper a chance to explain her side of things rather than jumping to conclusions, I apologize and hope you all can forgive me."

Sweetflower looked at Snowwhisper. Cloudheart spoke up, "while this is a lot to take in, I have never doubted for a minute that Snowwhisper was my sister, and a Thunderclan cat through and through. I don't care what visions you have seen. Starclan may try to decide our fate and guide our paws, but, at the end of the day, it's up to us to make our own decisions."

Rainstorm looked over at Cloudheart. She realized how right her sister was and how wise she seemed to have grown. She knew above everyone else what it truly meant to change your fate. When everyone else had given up on her, she had still believed in herself and become a warrior, soon to be a mother.

Bloodpath looked over and narrowed his eyes at Snowwhisper before he shrugged, "I have no reason to claw you."

Snowwhisper looked up, "and you never will. I am a Thunderclan cat. Those white cats have been tormenting me since I was a young apprentice. They call themselves the Sparrow. They are all female and all white coated. For some reason they believe that I am going to help them tear the Clans apart, but I never would dream of it. What would I gain by destroying the very things I love the most in this world?"

She looked between her mother and her father, then her sisters and finally Bloodpath, "I feel like I was sabotaged merely by being born. It sucks, and I can't control how I was born, but I can control my actions. The Sparrow aren't my kin. You all are, and I hope you can still put some trust in me."

Bluesong leapt up, "of course! I will always love all my daughters and their mates! I have no reason to change my mind on that. I'm your father, and while other father's may choose to ignore their kits, I want to choose to be there for them."

He walked between each of his daughters and pressed his muzzle on their head, finally stopping at Bloodpath and doing the same. Bloodpath let out a slightly annoyed hiss and swiped at him with sheathed claws. Bluesong merely purred. He finally ended at Sweetflower and twined his tail in hers, gazing at each of them with love in his blue eyes.

Rainstorm felt as if a cloud that had been shadowing her for a rather long time was now lifted. She seemed to sag with relief, "I'm sorry for doubting you Snowwhisper. Do you think you can forgive me?"

Snowwhisper stared at her for a moment before walking over and licking her cheek, "Mouse-brain, of course I forgive you. You're my sister."

"And I yours." Rainstorm replied.

"Honestly, enough of this yacking. I need to get back to my duties

before Chestnutstar turns me into crow-food." Bloodpath looked around at them awkwardly before he walked over to Cloudheart and briefly twined his tail with hers, "love you." He murmured and dashed away towards the clearing.

Rainstorm purred with laughter and shook her head. Things were going to be ok.

"Now will you two get some rest? You will catch your death without adequate sleep, and I'm sure you will be back on regular patrols come next sunrise. Off to bed now!" Sweetflower began shooing them.

Rainstorm sighed and had to agree with her mother. She felt tired down to her bones. She honestly could sleep for a moon, and when she began dragging herself towards the warriors den, she wasn't aware of time even passing.

There were three new and cozy looking nests towards the outer walls. Rainstorm picked a middle one and curled up. Sweetflower soon followed. She had a mouthful of soft feathers and began tucking them so that Rainstorm was even more comfortable. She then began grooming her and Snowwhisper followed soon after. Rainstorm felt the pelt of her mother and sister press against her, and sank into a peaceful sleep.